

# THE TOWER OF OBLIVION

OLIVER ONIONS



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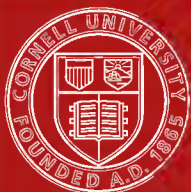
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# THE TOWER OF OBLIVION



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# The Tower of Oblivion

BY  
OLIVER ONIONS, *pseud.*

AUTHOR OF  
"A CASE IN CAMERA," ETC.

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To

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

and the Ladies and Gentlemen of

"THE BEGGAR'S OPERA COMPANY"

(Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, June 5th, 1920)

who were so constantly his

"pleasure and soft repose"

while the following pages were  
writing, this book is dedicated

by

their friend and well-wisher

THE AUTHOR

Kensington - - - - 1921



## CONTENTS

### ENGLAND

	PAGE
THE SIDE-SLIP . . . . .	I
THE STERN CHASE . . . . .	57
THE STRAPHANGER . . . . .	91
THE DOUBLE CROSS . . . . .	129
THE PIVOT . . . . .	181

### FRANCE

THE LONG SPLICE . . . . .	207
THE EVEN KEEL . . . . .	261
THE CUT-OUT . . . . .	327
THE DESERT ISLAND . . . . .	371
THE HOME STRETCH . . . . .	407



ENGLAND

PART I

THE SIDESTEP



# THE TOWER OF OBLIVION

## I

I think it is Edgar Allan Poe who says that while a plain thing may on occasion be told with a certain amount of elaboration of style, one that is unusual in its very nature is best related in the simplest terms possible. I shall adopt the second of these methods in telling this story of my friend, Derwent Rose. And I will begin straight away with that afternoon of the spring of last year when, with my own eyes, I first saw, or fancied I saw, the beginning of the change in him.

The Lyonesse Club meets in an electric-lighted basement-suite a little way off the Strand, and as I descended the stairs I saw him in the narrow passage. He was standing almost immediately under an incandescent lamp that projected on its curved petiole from the wall. The light shone brilliantly on his hair, where hardly a hint of grey or trace of thinness yet showed, and his handsome brow and straight nose were in full illumination and the rest of his face in sharp shadow. He wore a dark blue suit with an exquisitely pinned soft white silk collar, to which, as I watched, his fingers moved once; and he was examining with deep attention a print that hung on the buff-washed wall.

I spoke behind him. "Hello, Derry! One doesn't often see your face here."

Quietly as I spoke, he started. Ordinarily he had very straight and steady grey-blue eyes, alert and receptive, but for some seconds they looked from me to the print and from the print to me, irresolutely and with equally divided

attention. One would almost have thought that he had heard his name called from a great distance. Then his eyes settled finally on the print, and he repeated my last words over his shoulder.

“My face? Here? . . . No.”

“What’s the picture? Anything special?”

Still without moving his eyes from it he replied, “The picture? You ought to know more about it than I—it’s your Club, not mine——”

And he continued his absorbed scrutiny.

Now I had passed that picture scores of times before and had never found it worth a glance. It was a common collyre reproduction of a stodgy night-effect, a full moon in a black-leaded sky with reflections in water to match—price perhaps five shillings. Then suddenly, looking over his shoulder, I realised where his interest in it lay. He was not looking at the picture at all. In the polished glass, that made an excellent mirror in that concentrated light, I had seen his eyes earnestly fixed on his own eyes, his cheeks, his hair, his chin. . . .

Well, Derwent Rose had better reason than most men for looking at himself in a picture-glass if he chose. Indeed it had already struck me that that afternoon he looked even more than ordinarily fresh and handsome. Let me, before we go any further, describe his personal appearance to you.

He had, as I knew, passed his forty-fifth birthday in the preceding January; but he would have been taken anywhere for at least ten years younger. You will believe this when I tell you that at the age of thirty-nine, that is to say in the year 1914, he had walked into a recruiting-office, had given his age as twenty-eight, received the compliments of the R.A.M.C. major who had examined him, had joined an infantry battalion as a private, risen to the rank of company-sergeant-major, and had hardly looked a day older when he had come out again, with a herring-bone of chevrons on his cuff and a captain’s stars on his shoulder—not so much as scratched. He was just over six feet high, with the shoulders of a paviour and the heart and lung capacity of a diver.



Had you not been told that he wrote novels you would have thought that he ran a ranch. His frame was a perfectly balanced combination of springiness and dead-lift power of muscle; and to see those grey-blue eyes that looked into yours out of unwrinkled lids was to wonder what secret he possessed that the cares and rubs and disillusionings of life should so have passed him by.

Yet he had had his share of these, and more. His looks might be smooth, but wrinkles enough lay behind his writing. From those boyish eyes that reminded you of a handler of boats or a breaker of horses there still peeped out from time to time the qualities of his earlier, uneasy books—the gay and mortal and inhuman irony of *The Vicarage of Bray*, the vehement, unchecked passion of *An Ape in Hell*. If to the ordinary bookstall-gazer these works were unknown—well, that was part of the task that Derwent Rose had set himself. It is part of the task any writer sets himself who refuses all standards but his own, and works on the assumption that he is going to live for ever. Only his last published book, *The Hands of Esau*, showed a fundamental urbanity, a mellower restraint, and perhaps these were the securer the more hardly they had been come by. I for one expected that his next book would rise like a star above the vapours where we others let off our little six-shilling crackers . . . but his body seemed a mere flouting of the years.

And here he stood under the corolla of an incandescent lamp, looking at himself for wrinkles!

Then in the glass he caught my eye, and flushed a little to have been caught attitudinising. He gave a covert glance round to see whether anybody else had observed him. A few yards away, in the doorway, Madge Aird was smilingly receiving the Club's guests, but for the moment Madge was looking the other way. Then he spoke in a muffled voice.

"Well? Notice anything? How do I look? How do I strike you? No, I don't want a compliment. I'm asking you a question. How do I look? I've a special reason for wanting to know."

I laughed a little, not without envy.

"How do you look!" I said. "Another ten years will be time enough for you to begin to worry about your looks, Derry. I know your age, of course, but for all practical purposes you may consider yourself thirty-five, my young friend."

Sadly, sadly now I remember the eagerness of his turn.

"How much?" he demanded.

"I said thirty-five or thereabouts, you Darling of the Gods. I'm fifty, but you make me look sixty, and when you're a hundred your picture will be in the papers with the O.M. round your neck. You'll probably have picked up the Nobel Prize too, and a few other trifles on the way. You've got a physique to match your brain, lucky fellow that you are, and nothing but accident can stop you. Don't go out and get run over, that's all. Well, are you coming in?"

But he hung back. And yet it was largely his own fault if in such places as this Club he felt like a fish out of water. It might even have been called a perverse and not very amiable vanity in him, and I had hoped he had got over this shyness, arrogance, or both. We have to live in a world, even if we are as gifted mentally and physically as was Derwent Rose. But it was no good pressing him. I remembered him of old.

"Then if you're not coming in?" I ventured to hint; and again his hand went to the soft collar.

"What have I come for, you mean? I want you to find out for me if there's a Mrs Bassett here."

"I don't think I know her."

"Mrs Hugo Bassett. Ask somebody, will you?"

"What's she like to look at?"

"Can't say. Haven't seen her for years."

"Wait a bit. Is it somebody called Daphne Bassett?"

"Yes, yes—Daphne," he said quickly.

"Who published what's called a 'first novel' some little time ago?"

Instantly I saw that I had said something he didn't like. The blood stirred in his cheeks. He spoke roughly, im-

politely. And even up to this point his manner had been curt enough.

"Why do you say it like that?" he demanded. "'First' novel, with a sneer? She wrote a novel, if that's what you mean."

Yet, though he began by glaring at me, he ended by looking uneasily away. You too may have wondered why publishers so eagerly insist that some novel or other is a really-and-truly 'first' one. Your bootmaker doesn't boast that the pair of boots he sells you is his 'first' pair, and you wouldn't eat your cook's 'first' dinner if you could help it. You may take it from me that in the ordinary course of things Derwent Rose would have been far more likely to applaud the novel that ended an ignominious career than the one that began it. Yet here he was, apparently wishing to outface me about something or other, yet at the same time unable to look me in the eye.

"There's got to be a first before there can be a second, hasn't there?" he growled. "Jessica had to have a First Prayer, didn't she? And is there such a devil of a lot of difference between one novel and another when you come to think of it—yours, or mine or anybody else's?"

It was at this point that I began to watch him attentively.

"Go on, Derry," I said.

"There isn't; you know there isn't; and I'm getting sick of this superior attitude. Why must everybody do the Big Bow Wow all the time? Can't somebody write something just for amuse—I mean must they always be banging the George Coverham Big Drum? As long as it doesn't make any pretence. . . . Have you read it?" he demanded suddenly.

"No."

"Then you don't know anything about it."

It was here that I became conscious of what I have called the Change. Whatever had happened to put him out, this was not the Derry Rose I had lately seen. Surely my remark about that "first" novel had been innocent enough; but he had replied surlily, unamiably, unfamiliarly. . . . "Un-

familiar?" No, that is not the word. I should rather say remotely familiar, recollected, brought forward again out of some time that was past. Just as in his resplendent physical appearance he seemed to be "too" well, if such a thing can be, so in his manner he seemed to be too . . . something; I gave it up. I only knew that the author of *The Hands of Esau* would not have spoken thus.

"Well, will you find out for me if she's here?" he said in a softer one.

I fancy that already he was sorry he had not spoken more quietly.

"Why not come in and see for yourself?"

"Oh—you know how I hate this sort of thing."

"Not long ago you spoke of joining the Lyonnaise."

"I know. I thought I would. But I've decided it's out of my line."

"Then at least come and be introduced to Mrs Aird. She'll know whether Mrs Bassett's here or not."

The blue-grey eyes gave mine a quick and critical glance.

"Is that the Mrs Aird who writes those bright books about young women and their new clothes and how right their instincts are if you only give them plenty of pocket-money and leave 'em alone?"

I smiled. Perhaps it was a little like Madge. But I noticed his sharp distinction between the novels of one woman and the "first" novel of another. It began to look as if behind Mrs Hugo Bassett the novelist lay Daphne Bassett the woman.

"Well," I sighed, "I'm to ask for Mrs Hugo Bassett. What's the title of her book?"

"*The Parthian Arrow.*"

"Mrs Hugo Bassett, author of *The Parthian Arrow.* Very well——"

I approached Madge, but before I could ask my question she had drawn me inside the doorway.

"Who is he?" she whispered ardently in my ear. Her plump ringed hand clutched my sleeve, and there was the

liveliest curiosity in the dark eyes that looked up at me from under her nodding hat with black *pleureuse* feathers.

"Is there a Mrs Bassett here—Daphne Bassett?"

"No. But——"

"Has she been, and is she likely to come?"

"She hasn't been, and nobody'll come now. But George——"

"I'll see you presently; just let me get rid of my message," I said; and I returned to Rose.

A glance at my face was enough for him. He may have muttered a "Thank-you," but I didn't hear it; he had spun on his heel and in a moment was half-way to the cloakroom. I hope he got his own hat, for he was out again almost instantly. I had a glimpse of his magnificent back as he hurried along the passage, then a flying heel at the turn of the stairs and he was gone. Turning, I saw that Madge had watched his departure with me. She almost ran to me.

"Quickly, George—who, *who* is your Beautiful Bear, and why have you been keeping a superb creature like that from me?" she demanded. "I knew he was waiting for a woman. Every skirt that came in——" at the swing of her head the feathers tossed like an inky weeping-elm in a gale. "But," she added, "I confess I never saw a man admire himself *quite* so openly before."

My friend has scored off me often enough in the past. This time I scored off her.

"Derwent Rose always was good-looking," I remarked.

She fell a step back.

"George!—*Derwent Rose!* You don't mean to say that *that* was Derwent Rose?"

"I always thought you knew everybody in London."

"*That* was Derwent Rose!" Then she added, with inexpressible conviction and satisfaction, "*Ah!*"

I am always a little uneasy when Madge Aird says "Ah!" in that tone. She was Madge Ruthven before she married Alec Aird, and I have often wondered whether in the past any of her Scottish forbears had any traffic with France.

I am not now thinking of the air with which she always wore her clothes, from whatever it was on her head to the always irresistible shoes on her tiny feet. I mean the workings of her mind. There is none of our northern softness and hesitation and mystery about these. All she thinks and says has a logical completeness and finish that somehow always seems just a little too good to be true. Few things in this world are so neatly right as that. But wrong though her conclusions may be, they are always dazzlingly effective, and you have to swallow them or reject them whole.

"Ah!" she murmured again, with the intensest self-approval; and I wondered what unreliable imperfection she was meditating now. You never know with her. She sees so many people, goes to so many places, hears so much. Often the mere mention of a name is enough to touch off that instantaneous fuse of her memory that leads straight into the heart of heaven knows what family history or hidden scandal.

"And what do you mean by 'Ah'?" I asked her.

"The gorgeous creature! I never dreamed—but this makes the situation perfectly fascinating!"

"What situation?"

"Why, of him and Daphne Bassett. But poor old George, I keep forgetting that you're the noblest Roman of them all and don't listen to our horrid petty little scandal. And evidently you haven't read *The Parthian Arrow*."

"I haven't. Tell me what it's about."

"But you've read *An Ape in Hell*?"

"Of course. Tell me what the other's about."

But at that moment she was claimed. Her next words came over her shoulder as, with a wisk of her ribboned ankles and another gale in the shake of feathers, she was off.

"Not now—another time. I shall be in fairly early this evening if you're staying in town. It's quite an interesting situation. And if you'll bring your Beautiful Bear to see me some time, I'll——"

I understood her to mean that in that case she would bring Mrs Hugo Bassett also.

## II

I live out in Surrey, my car happened to be in dock, and I had my train to think of. As I walked slowly up the short street to the Strand I puzzled over Madge's words. Evidently she found some connection between that "first" novel, *The Parthian Arrow*, and Rose's own book, *An Ape in Hell*. Well, my ignorance could soon be remedied. There was a bookshop just round the corner, and I could be the possessor of a copy of Mrs Bassett's book in five minutes.

But suddenly, on the point of hailing a taxi, I dropped the point of my stick again. Somewhere at the back of my mind was the feeling that there was some invitation or appointment I had overlooked. I knew that it could be of no great importance, and, looking back on these events since, I have thought that it was perhaps a mere disinclination to go down to Surrey that night that gave me pause. I may say that I am unmarried, and have got my housekeeper fairly well trained to my ways.

So, standing on the kerb, I brought a number of papers from my pocket and began to turn them over in search of the forgotten appointment.

I found it. It was a lecture by a Fellow of a Learned Society, and it was to take place at the rather unusual hour of six o'clock. No doubt this was in order that the learned speaker might get his paper over by half-past seven, leaving his learned listeners free to dine. A taxi slowed down in front of me.

"Society of Arts," I said to the driver.

A minute later I was on my way to see Derwent Rose for the second time that afternoon.

I will tell you in a moment the subject of that lecture I had so suddenly decided to attend. First, a word as to my attitude at that time towards new discoveries and new thought in general. I was enormously, wistfully interested in them. Instinctively, at that time, I stretched out my hands to them. I had lived long enough in the world to realise that such

events as Trafalgar and the French Revolution were mere events of yesterday, and the possibilities of an equally near to-morrow haunted me. I shrank from the thought that while the dead stones of the Law Courts and Australia House would still be there after I had gone, I should not at least be able to make a guess at the stream of Life, uncradled yet, that would beat and press and flow along those channels in so little a time, the new blood of London's old unchanging veins. One begins to think of these things when one is fifty.

So, at a minute or so to six, my taxi set me down in the Adelphi, when I might have been a happier man had it taken me straight to Waterloo.

And now for what that lecture was all about.

My meaning will perhaps be clearer if I give an extract from a leading article in *The Times* of slightly later date. On a subject of this kind I would rather use an expert's words than risk the inaccuracies that might creep into my own.

"Human beings," the article begins, "differ not only in the knowledge they have acquired, but in their dower of intelligence or natural ability. It has long been accepted that the former property may continue to increase until the natural faculties begin to abate, but that the latter has a maximum for each individual, attained early in life. . . . Intelligence, as opposed to knowledge, is fully developed before the age of schooling is over. Sixteen years has usually been taken as the age at which, even in those best endowed, the limit of intelligence has been reached. Obviously the standard varies in different individuals; the degree of intelligence passed through by the more fortunate at the age of ten may be the final attainment of others, and all intermediate stages occur. . . . Mr H. H. Goddard, an American psychologist of international repute, classifies the intelligence of his countrymen into seven grades, but believes that in exceptional cases, amounting to four and a half per cent. of the population, a superlative standard is reached at the age of nineteen. On the other hand, seventy per cent. of the citizens of the United States have to carry on their lives



with the intelligence of children of fourteen, and ten per cent. with that of children of ten."

It was to hear these conclusions of Mr Goddard's expounded by a fellow-savant that I had come that afternoon to the Society of Arts.

To tell the truth, a certain whimsical humour in the idea had attracted me. When a man's books sell as well as mine do, and he is as flatteringly thought of as I am, it is rather tickling to be told that he is really an infant of sixteen or seventeen, telling fairy-stories to a gigantic public nursery the average age of which is perhaps twelve. Sir George Coverham, Knight, merely the top boy of a kindergarden of adults! . . . It pleased me, and I rather hoped the lecturer would approach his subject from that humorous angle.

The lights were being turned down as I entered the lecture chamber. Quietly, not to make a disturbance, I tiptoed to the nearest seat. Then, as with a preliminary hiss or two the shaft of light from the lantern pierced the gloom, I was able dimly to distinguish that the subject of the lecture had not attracted more than a couple of dozen people. These barely filled the first two rows. The rest of the theatre appeared to be empty. Of the speaker himself nothing could be seen but a glimpse of white beard as he moved slightly at the reading-lamp.

He read from a typescript in a flat, monotonous voice, with once in a while a halting explanatory remark that trailed, paused, and then stopped altogether. I watched the acute angles his wand made with its own shadow on the diagrams projected by the lantern.

Then I thought I heard an impatient movement and muttering somewhere behind me. The speaker, after another long and painful pause, had just said, "I hope I've made that clear, gentlemen"; and I was almost certain that the muffled growl had taken the shape of the words "You don't know a damned thing about it!"

Then, a few minutes later, the sound was repeated, this time accompanied by an unmistakable groan.

"Sssh!" said somebody sharply from the front or second row.

The lecture dragged on.

But about the next and final outbreak there was no doubt whatever. Neither was there about the sharp suffering of whoever was the cause of it. Somebody a couple of rows behind me must be ill, I thought, and evidently others thought so too, for the lecturer came definitely to a stop, and my eyes, now accustomed to the gloom, saw the turning of faces.

"Is anybody——?" a secretary or chairman called out, and I expected the light to go up at any moment.

In the end, however, the lecture was finished without further incident. The lights were switched on, the dingy classic painted panels on the walls could be seen, and instantly every face, my own included, was turned towards the back of a man who was seen to be hurriedly making his way to the door.

I cannot tell you what happened at the Society of Arts after that. I was already on my feet, hurrying after that back. It was the same back I had seen, in the same haste, leaving the Lyonesse Club less than two hours ago.

He had got to the entrance hall before I caught him up. He accepted with rather disturbing docility the arm I slipped into his. All the fight had gone out of him; he might not have been the same man who had so recently tried to outface me about first novels. I looked at his face as we stood by the glass doors that opened on to John Street. It showed both fear and pain.

"What's the matter, Derry? Can I be of any help?" I asked him anxiously.

He muttered, "Yes—yes—about time I called somebody in—just about enough of it——"

"Do you want a doctor? Shall we call at a chemist's?"

He stared at me for a moment; then I vow he almost laughed.

"A doctor? No thanks. One dose a day's quite enough."

"One dose of what?"

"Words," he replied, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the lecture chamber.

We passed out and into John Street, he accommodating his ordinary London-to-Brighton pace to mine. He once told me that five miles an hour was walking, six stepping out a bit, and anything over six and a half really "going."

"Which way?" I asked at the end of the street.

"I suppose you'd better come round to my place," he replied; and we crossed the Strand and struck north past Trafalgar Square.

He lived (I am not troubling you with the lobster we shared standing up at a counter, during which repast we did not exchange one single word)—he lived in Cambridge Circus, and I hope I have not given you the impression that Derwent Rose was desperately poor. When I spoke of him as having none too much either of money or success I meant as by comparison with myself. Until, quite suddenly and by no means early in life, my own reward came to me, I should have considered his quarters luxurious—once you had got there. This you did by means of a narrow staircase from the various landings of which branched off the offices of variety-agents, film-brokers, furriers, jewellers and I don't know what else. The double windows he had had fitted into his room subdued the noises of the Circus outside, and if he cared to draw his thick brocade curtains as well he could obtain almost dead silence. His black oak furniture was brightly polished by some basement person or other, his saddlebag chairs scrupulously beaten and brushed. The two or three thousand books that completely filled two of his walls might have been arranged by a librarian, so methodically and conveniently were they disposed, with lettered and numbered tickets at intervals along the edges of the shelves; and I knew that he had begun a catalogue of them. All this portion of his room spoke of a man settling down into meticulousness, whom disorderly habits and departures from routine begin to irritate. In marked contrast with it was the topsy-turvy state of the large oval table with the beaded edge. This was in an appalling state of confusion. News-

papers had been tossed aside on to it, open books with their faces downwards sprawled over it. Empty shells of brown paper still kept something of the shape of the books they had contained, and ends of packer's string with bits of sealing-wax twined among them. A teacup lay on its side in a wet saucer, a large oval milk-can stood next to it. And on the top of all were the snaky rubber cords of an exerciser and a ten-pound, horsehair-stuffed medicine-ball.

I was about to hang up my hat in the neatly-curtained recess he had had fitted up as a lobby when he exclaimed "Oh, chuck it anywhere," and set me the example by throwing his own hat and stick on to the clutter. They caught the medicine-ball, which rolled an inch or two, tottered, and then fell with a soft dead thump to the floor. The next instant, as if now that his own door was closed behind him there was no longer any need to keep up appearances, he himself had fallen with a similar thud to the sofa. He, this piece of physical perfection who called six miles an hour "stepping out a bit," lay all limp and relaxed, with lids quivering lightly over his closed eyes. He spoke with his eyes closed.

"Well, what did you think of it?" he said, breathing deeply.

I tried to keep my anxiety out of my tone.

"What did I think of the lecture?"

"Yes, the lecture if you like. That'll do to start with. No, I don't want anything, thanks. Tell me what you thought of the lecture."

I began to say something, I hardly remember what, when, still with his eyes closed and twitching, he interrupted me.

"All those silly charts—all those useless figures about the American Army—that's all waste of time. Making work for work's sake. I could have told him all that straight away."

I remembered those groans in the obscurity of the lecture-room. I spoke quietly.

"Is that what you were going to tell him when you—interrupted a little?"

I had to wait for his reply. When it did come I hardly heard it, so low did he speak.

"I know what you mean; but I can only tell you that if you'd been vivisected like that you'd have squirmed a bit too."

I couldn't help thinking he had taken that lecture in a curiously personal sense, and I said so.

"Vivisected?" I exclaimed. "I was vivisected, as you call it, just as much as you were—perhaps more in some ways. What on earth are you talking about? It's a general question. It's human functions and faculties at large he was vivisecting, not you or me. So," I concluded, "we were all vivisected alike, and when everybody's vivisected—you see——" I made a little gesture.

Then he opened his eyes, and there was an expression in them that suddenly dried me up. It was an even more remarkable throw-back to a remembered and earlier manner than that I had witnessed earlier in the afternoon. In short, it was an expression of unconcealed contempt.

"Q.E.D.," he said. "Finis, Explicit, and the Upper Fourth next Term. You'd have made a good schoolmaster. . . . I tell you that when I say 'I' and 'myself'"—he positively glared with irascibility and impatience—"I mean myself singly and specially, understand—the egregious and indestructible ego—and not merely just as much or as little as anybody else. Get that well into your head or I won't talk to you."

Had he not been so visibly suffering I shouldn't have stood the tone of it for a moment, not even from him. And let me tell you at once the surmise that had already flashed through my brain. I am a dependable sort of person myself, one of the kind that nothing startlingly new is ever likely to happen to; but I was not so sure about his kind. Brains like his often fly off at queer tangents, and I wondered whether he had been reading too much of this current cant about "multiple personality" and had allowed it to run away with him. Every Tom, Dick and Harry seems to rush to that for an explanation of everything nowadays. I had already noticed, by the way, that one of the books that sprawled cover uppermost on his table was a book on the

thyroid gland. But suddenly he seemed to guess at my thoughts. He spoke more quietly. Indeed he seemed to be fully aware of these outbreaks of his, and to be trying to resist them more and more strenuously as our conversation proceeded.

"Sorry, old fellow," he said contritely. "I'm very sorry. I oughtn't to have spoken like that. But I'm not what they call 'disintegrating'; I'm the last man to do that. When I say 'I' I mean the 'I' I've always been. That's just the devil of it."

"Suppose you begin at the beginning," I suggested.

"There you are!" was his swift reply. He was sitting up on the sofa now, and was facing it, whatever "it" was, with a calmer courage. "I *can't* begin at the beginning. All I really *know* yet's the end, and of course that hasn't come. . . . It's a damn-all of a problem. Get yourself a drink if you want one. No, I won't have one; I—I daren't. And you might draw the curtains. When I hear the buses and taxis it makes me want to go out."

I drew his curtains for him, but did not take the drink. He sat on the sofa leaning a little forward, his great hands clasped between his knees and working slightly and powerfully, as if he cracked walnuts in the palms of them. The grey-blue eyes avoided mine. I have seen that same avoiding glance in the eyes of a man who had something perfectly true to tell, but so utterly improbable that he was self-convicted of lying even in speaking of it.

"About what you were saying this afternoon in that Club place—my age," he began in a constrained voice. "You—you meant it, I suppose?"

"That you'd live to be a hundred and be world-famous? Yes, I meant it in a way. I didn't mean you to take me too literally, of course."

"And you thought"—he hesitated for a moment and shivered slightly—"it was something to be congratulated about?"

"Well— isn't it? Professionally you've staked out a magnificent course for yourself in which time means practically

everything, and so, if you live long enough, as you look like doing——”

Yet I cannot tell you what premonition of calamity seemed already to flow like an induced current from him to me. Ordinarily I am not specially sensitised to receive impressions of this kind. I am just a man who had had the luck to think as most other people think and to be able to express their thoughts for them. The greater therefore must have been that current's projecting force. Certainly the greater was my shock when it did come.

“I shan't live to be a hundred,” he said in a low voice.

I cannot remember what I said, or whether I said anything at all. All that I do remember is his own next words, the swift and agonising collapse of the whole man as he said them, and the feeling of my own nape and spine.

“No, not a hundred. You're counting the wrong way. You got my age quite right this afternoon. I'm thirty-five. And I shall live till I'm sixteen.”

### III

Among the things that have contributed to the wordly success of Sir George Coverham, Knight, has been that author's rigid exclusion from his books of everything that does not commend itself to the average common sense of his fellow-beings. The most he seeks in his modest writings—I speak of him in the third person because, as Derry's head dropped over his knees, it seemed impossible that this Sir George Coverham and I could be one and the same person—the most he seeks is a line somewhere between ordinary experience and the most, rather than the least, attractive presentation of it. In a word, his books are polite, debonair, and deliberately planned so as not to shock anybody.

Therefore in some ways he may be quite the wrong person to be writing this story of Derwent Rose. For example: he had known Rose for some fifteen years, and, not to mince matters, there had been many highly impolite things in

Rose's life during that time. More than once it had seemed a very good thing indeed that he had had to work hard for his money. The great mental concentration necessary for the writing of some of his books must have kept him out of a good deal of mischief.

So I (I am allowing myself the man and Sir George Coverham the novelist gradually to reunite, as they gradually reunited that evening)—I, his friend, had already done what we all do when we are completely bowled over. I had instinctively sought refuge from his lunatic announcement in trifles—any trifle that lay nearest to hand. Suddenly I found myself wondering why he was afraid to take a drink, and why I had had to draw his curtains lest the sound of the buses and taxis should call him out into the streets.

But presently he had recovered a little. He was even able to look at me with the faint shadow of a smile.

"Well, that's the lot," he said. "I've given you the whole thing in a nutshell. You heard that lecture and you know me. You can fill in the rest for yourself."

Suddenly I looked at my watch. It was not yet half-past nine. I got on to my feet.

"You'd better get your hat and come down to Haslemere with me," I said. "We can catch the ten-ten. You're all on edge about something and you want a change. Leave word here that you'll be back in a week, and come along."

But he did not move, except to shake his head.

"I expected you'd say that. It's what anybody would say. It simply means that you haven't taken it in yet. No, since we've started we'll go on—unless you'd rather not. I warn you there's a good deal to be said for not going on."

"Why not talk about it down at Haslemere?"

Once more there was the hint of irascibility.

"Do you want to hear or don't you?"

Slowly I sat down again, and he resumed his former attitude of cracking nuts with his palms for nutcrackers.

"There's not an atom of doubt about what I'm going to tell you," he began. "Not an atom. Unless I'm mistaken you saw for yourself this afternoon—though of course you



didn't know what you were seeing. You simply thought I looked younger, didn't you?"

I waited in silence.

"And I fancy my manner got a bit on your nerves—does a bit now for that matter?"

This also I let pass without remark.

"Well, let's start from that point. You said I looked thirty-five. Well, it's just that that's getting on your nerves—the less amiable side of my character when I was thirty-five, and—and—well, when you go you might take that bottle of whisky with you and make me sign the pledge or something. I'm trying—I'm honestly trying—to hang on, you see."

I sighed. "I wish you could make it a bit plainer," I said.

"I'm making it as plain as I can. Is *this* plain—that something's happened to me, I don't know what, and *I'm getting younger instead of older?*"

"Derry——" I began, half rising; but he held up one heroically-moulded hand.

"Let me finish. And if I happen to go to sleep suddenly you just walk straight out, do you hear? Walk right out and shut the door. You're to promise that. There are some things I won't ask even a pal to go through. . . . So there it is. Instead of getting older like everybody else I'm simply getting younger. I'm perfectly sober—I haven't had a drink for five days—and I tell you I shall go on till I'm thirty, and then twenty-five, and then twenty, and then, at sixteen or thereabouts—that fellow wasn't very sound on his ages to-night—I shall die. *Now* have you got it?"

Even about human nature there are some things that you have to accept as it were mathematically. I am no mathematician, but I do know (for example) that the common phrase "mathematically certain" is a misnomer. The whole essence of mathematics lies, not in its certainties, but in its assumptions, its power to embrace any concept whatever and pin it down in the form of a symbol. Once you have adopted the symbol you don't trouble about what lies behind it. You merely proceed to reason on it.

It can only have been in some such way that I accepted Derwent Rose's mad statement and was willing to see what superstructure he was prepared to raise upon it. I was even able to speak in an almost calm and ordinary voice.

"Tell me how you know all this," I said.

He was logical and prompt.

"By my knowledge of myself, and also by my memory. I know what I was at thirty-five, and I know what I did; well, I simply know that I'm that man again, and that I shall go on and re-do more or less what he's already done. At some point in my life I must have got turned round, and now I'm living it backwards again. And put multiple personality quite out of your head. That's the whole point. I'm not anybody else, and I shan't be anybody else. At this moment I'm Derwent Rose, as he always was and always will be, but simply back at the mental and physical stage when he wrote *An Ape in Hell*."

To-day, looking back, it gives me an indescribable ache at my heart to remember the sudden and immense sense of relief his words gave me. I breathed again, as if a window had been opened and a draught of cool fresh air let in.

For if he only meant memory, then the thing wasn't so bad. The maniacal idea that had sent that cold shiver up my spine was capable of an ordinary explanation after all. For what else is memory but the illusion that one is living backwards again in this sense? How many ancient loves, hates, angers, can we not re-experience in any idle hour we choose to give over to reverie? Beyond a doubt Rose had in some way been abusing this mysterious faculty, and Surrey and the pine-woods was the place for him.

"I see," I said at last. "I confess you frightened me for a moment. Anyway that's all right. You only have what we all have more or less. You merely bring greater powers than the rest of us to bear on an ordinary phenomenon. I don't want to talk about your work, but it always did seem to me that you went to rather appalling heights and fearsome depths for the stuff of it. Personally I don't think

either heaven or hell is the safest place to go to for 'copy.' Too terrifying altogether."

He seemed to consider this deeply. He was almost quiet again now. Again he cracked invisible nuts, and his heels and toes rose and fell gently and alternately on the carpet.

"That's rather a new idea you've given me, George," he said at last. "I admit I hadn't thought of that. It might explain the beginning anyway—the turn-round. I suppose you mean I've been too close to the flames or the balm, and have got singed or the other thing, whatever you call it. I see. Yes. . . . It's probably nothing to do with the thyroid after all. I've been reading the wrong books. I never thought of the writings of the Saints. Or the Devils. . . . By the way, some of the Saints induced the stigmata on themselves by a sort of spiritual process, didn't they?"

I frowned and moved uneasily in my chair. I wasn't anxious to hear Derwent Rose either on ecstasy or blasphemy. But he went on.

"So that's useful as far as it goes. But—you'd hardly call *this* spiritual, would you?"

I think I mentioned that he wore a soft white collar, pinned and tied with exquisite neatness. A moment later he wore it no longer. Without troubling about pin, studs or buttons, with a swift movement he had ripped the collar, tie and half the shirt-band from his neck, and showed, of an angry and recent purply-red, vivid on his magnificent throat, two curved marks like these brackets—( ).

Now I am not more squeamish than most men. I am far from having lived the whole of my life in cotton-wool. But it needed no course in medical jurisprudence to tell me what those marks were—the marks of teeth, and of a woman's teeth. I was deeply wounded. Rose's amusements in this sort were no affair of mine, and I strongly resented this humiliation both of himself and of me.

But his hand gripped my arm like a vice. Suddenly I saw a quite new pair in his grey-blue eyes. It was a swift fear lest, instead of helping him, I should turn against him.

“Good God, man!” he cried in a high voice. “Don’t think *that!* Don’t think I’m such a cur as to—oh, my God, *that* isn’t the point! I’m not bragging about my conquests! . . . The point is that *these marks are ten years old and they weren’t there last night!*”

I tried to free myself from his grip, but he wouldn’t let me go. He ran agitatedly on, repeating himself over and over again.

“There isn’t much imagination about *that*, is there? *That* isn’t fancy, is it? *That* doesn’t happen to any man any day, does it? A man would be likely to remember *that*, wouldn’t he? He wouldn’t forget it, if it was only for the shame of it! Is *that* just ordinary memory? And how would you feel when everything was healed over and forgotten, and you’d settled decently down, and hoped everything was forgiven you—and then you were to be dragged back over the ploughshares like that! I tell you you’ve got to see it all crowding back on you again, before you realise that forgetting’s the greatest happiness in life! . . . I tell you on my word of honour that that happened ten years ago, when I was thirty-five before, and that it wasn’t there last night! *Now* tell me I’m drunk or dreaming!”

Stupefied I stared at him. The issue was plain. Either he was telling the truth, or he was not. Either those marks were as recent as they looked or as old as he said. He was to be believed or disbelieved. There was no middle way.

And my heart sank like a stone in my breast as suddenly I found myself believing him. He saw that I did, and fumblingly sought to fasten the collar again. But he had torn both buttonhole and band, and could only cover up those shameful marks by turning up the collar of his dark blue jacket. He sat with his collar turned up for the rest of our talk.

Presently I felt a little more master of myself. I had moved over to the sofa and was sitting by his side. He, this youthful Hercules of forty-five, who wrote books and made you think of boats and horses, was weeping softly. He was weeping for misery and hate of what, apparently, he must

go through again. Stupidly my eyes rested on the carefully lettered and numbered shelves of books, and then on the slovenly litter of the table. The electric light gave the merest flicker—they were doing something at the power-station—and then burned quietly on. It shone on the black oak furniture and the saddlebag chairs, on our two hats on the table, on the neatly curtained recess where the hats should have been. It was impossible not to see that in its contrast of orderliness and disorder the very room showed two sharp and distinct phases. Almost with voices the inanimate things seemed to cry it aloud. The man who had catalogued those bays of books had been the author of *The Hands of Esau*. He who now threw everything down on to that disgraceful table was he who had written *An Ape in Hell*.

He still wept quietly. I put my hand on his knee.

“All right, Derry,” I said. “Try to pull yourself together. You say you can’t begin at the beginning. Very well, begin anywhere you like. I dare say something can be done. It may turn out to be—oh, shellshock or something.”

But already my heart told me that it would turn out to be nothing of the kind.

#### IV

I am not going to direct your attention specially to the more fantastic part of what Derwent Rose told me in his rooms that night. I have found no issue in that direction. Neither am I going into the metaphysics of the thing; I know no more about that than he ever knew himself. But if you care to read, in reverse, the progress of a man out of the sad shadows of middle-age back into the light and beauty and belief that once were his—always the same man, undeviating from the lines laid down by his own nature, re-approaching each phase as he had formerly approached it, but in times and circumstances so complex and altered that nothing in the pilgrimage was constant but himself—if, I say, you care to read that extraordinary intertwining of what he had done

and what he re-did, and are content with this, and will not pull me up every time the mystery of the deeper cause confounds us both, then I am content too and we can go ahead.

It had been going on (he told me) for six months past; but at the outset I ought to warn you that he had two scales of time. Here I wish that we were all mathematicians, and that I could write and you could read his wondrous history in symbolised concepts. However, we will do the best we can with words.

Broadly speaking, he went backwards, not at a uniform rate, but in a series of irregular and unequal slips. That is to say, that though in six months or so of actual time he had retrograded the ten years between forty-five and thirty-five, it did not follow that he had gone back five years in three months or two and a half in any given six weeks. I went carefully into this point with him. I asked him, if the ratio was not a steady twenty to one (or a hundred and twenty months of experienced time as against six by the clock) what he estimated it at for shorter periods of either. But to this he could give no clear answer. Being unable to fix the precise turning-point, and hardly knowing when the indications in himself had begun (since at first he had put the whole thing aside as an absurdity), he had no datum. He had only become fully awake to the phenomenon when it had not been possible to disregard it any longer.

"Well, as we've got to assume something let's assume that," I said. "When was it that you first had no doubt at all?"

This he did more or less remember. I give his account in his own words.

"It was about two months ago," he said. "I'd no book on hand. I don't mind admitting that I'd never felt so stale and empty and sick of everything I'd ever done. In fact I'd got to the point you noticed this afternoon."

"What point was that? Don't let's take anything for granted."

"When you rubbed me up about that first novel. I'd got to the point of hardly seeing any difference worth mention-

ing between the worst stuff and the best, Shakespeare included. Do you mind if I go into that rather in detail?"

"Do."

"Here, I thought, is this creature man, this fellow called George Coverham or Derwent Rose, brought naked into a world that marvellously doesn't care a rap about him—but that he's got to contrive to make some sort of an interpretation of, because it's where he's got to live. He hasn't got too long to live there either—a strictly limited time—so that there's just him and this wonderful uncaring universe for it. This and nothing else is what happens every time a human being's brought into the world. All this procreation and child-bearing are just for that—so that somebody can make head or tail of the world. . . . Well, what do they do to him? By and by they send him to school. That's the first step towards taking him away from this universe he's trying to make something of and telling him instead what some other naked being before him thought about it all. That's all right as far as it goes. Just once in a while, I suppose, two heads may be better than one. But"—he paused for emphasis—"when a third begins to repeat what a second has already repeated, and a fourth a third, and so on, by and by the universe begins to drop right away into the background. The process goes on—it has gone on—till not one in ten million dreams there's a universe at all. You know what I mean—all talk about talk about talk about it. So, if you've any sense of proportion at all, where does the difference between one book and another come in?"

"Well—that's the state of mind you were in," I observed. Goodness knows I wasn't trying to shut him up. If it did him good to talk I would gladly have listened to him all night. As for sharing these Olympian views of his, however, I have never had either the strength or the audacity. It is because of my own indefatigability in talking about talk about talk that they made me a Knight.

"I was only trying to explain how I felt," he answered apologetically. "Let's start again. It was two months ago within a few days, and I know it was a Monday morning,

because Mrs Hyems doesn't come up on Sundays, and she brought a parcel that had been overlooked from Saturday night. It was half-past eight, and I was in there shaving"—he nodded in the direction of his bedroom. "She wanted to call my attention to the parcel because it was registered."

"Is this just to fix the date, or has the parcel anything to do with it?"

"Both. I'm coming to the parcel in a minute. Well, as I was saying, I was just about fed up with things in general. Books in particular. Nice state of mind for an author with his living to earn to begin the week in! I remember stopping shaving to have a good hard look at myself. I remember saying to myself in the glass, 'You're young, you're a perfect miracle of youth; you've got quite a good brain as brains go; and yet instead of getting out of doors and living every minute of one of God's good days you'll sit down there, and make scratches on bits of paper that have got to be just like the scratches everybody else makes or you won't sell 'em; isn't there something wrong somewhere?' I asked myself that in the glass. And mind you, I was feeling extraordinarily fit physically. That's important. I'd felt like that for days past. Who wants to work when he feels like that?"

I sighed a little. Even I, with my modicum of health, have occasionally felt too fit to work.

"So I finished dressing and came in here to breakfast, and I was half-way through breakfast when that book caught my eye."

"What book?"

"The parcel I spoke of. It was a book. As a matter of fact it was Mrs Bassett's book, *The Parthian Arrow*."

I glanced at him. "Registered?"

"Yes. You mean one doesn't usually register a common or garden novel unless you want there to be no mistake about the person getting it?"

"Go on."

"So I opened it there and then and began to read it. I read it at a single sitting. Then I tore it in two. Wait a



bit, I'll show you. Pass me a book, any one. They're all the same."

I passed him a book from the untidy table, an ordinary two-inch-thick octavo volume in a cloth binding. Now read carefully. He didn't even change his position on the sofa. Using his knees only as a support, with his hands he tore the back into halves. Let me say it again. I don't mean he tore it lengthwise along the stitching. He didn't separate the pages into dozens or scores, nor bend or break it. He just tore it across as I might have torn a postcard. I can still see the creeping and fanning of the leaves under the dreadful pressure of his hands, the soft whity-grey fur of paper as the gap widened relentlessly before my eyes, hear the slightly harsher sound of the rending cloth and the little "zip" at the end.

Then he tossed the two halves on to the table again.

"I used to do a bit of that sort of thing years ago," he remarked, without even a quickening of his breath. "Half-crowns and packs of cards, you know. But I'd had to drop it. Your muscles have changed by the time you're forty-five. I'd tried to tear a pack of cards not long before, but I could only make a mess of them and had to give it up."

I found not a word to say. As much as the feat itself the terrifying ease with which he had done it made me gape.

"Yes, my strength came on me like Samson's that morning," he continued. "I was scared of it myself. I didn't know what was happening, you see. I'm simply trying to tell you the first time I knew there was no mistake about it."

I found my voice.

"But why did you tear the book? I—I hope you weren't looking for the author this afternoon to tear her too!" I laughed nervously.

He turned earnest eyes on me.

"I swear I never meant her, George—in that accursed *Ape* book of mine, I mean. Of course she must have thought I did, and—and—well, to be perfectly honest, I'm not quite sure she didn't start me on the idea. You've got to start

somewhere. But I went over it a dozen times afterwards. *Am* I the man to take it out of a woman in print?" he appealed piteously.

He was not, and I tried to reassure him; but he broke in anew.

"Why, I'd forgotten all about her before I'd written a couple of chapters! You're a novelist; you understand. If only she'd . . . But I suppose I left something in—some damnable wounding oversight—but I can't find it even yet"—he glared round the room as if in search of a copy of his own book to submit to cross-examination all over again.

And then abruptly he seemed to put the book aside. His manner changed. He lifted himself from the cushions and spoke in a strained voice.

"Look here, George," he said hurriedly, jumping from point to point, "let's be getting on. I may be having to turn you out soon; this may be no place for you. Where had we got to? Where I tore that book. You were asking me when I first felt sure of all this. Well, it wasn't just the book, it was what happened inside me as well. Something gave way. I was afraid. I'm afraid now. You've known me a long time, George; known scandalous things about me, I'm afraid. But a man can live a pretty queer sort of life and yet manage to keep something safe from harm all the time. It's that that I'm hanging on to now. You see, I've never had any habits or customs. I've never been the millionth man—the fellow who repeats what they've all said before him. Every morning of my life I've tried to look at the universe as if I'd never seen it before—as if it had never been seen by anybody before. Dashed risky way of living. . . . But I managed to keep something clean inside me . . . thank God . . . need it . . . badly . . . no time to go into all that now. . . ."

He muttered unintelligibly. He was not actually looking at his watch, and yet he gave the impression of having his eye on the passage of time. Suddenly he went on with a new spurt.

"Don't interrupt, please. I may have made a miscal-

culation. You see, when I drop off to sleep . . . About that book. I started it at breakfast, sent Mrs Hyems away, and never moved from my chair till I'd finished it in the afternoon. Then, when I ripped it in two, I seemed to rip something in myself with it. I can't describe it any other way. Something in me seemed to open and take me right back. Before breakfast that morning I was what they call 'settling down in life.' I'd written *Esau* since the *Ape*, and had lots of things planned. I'd even got a bit old-maidish about all this"—he indicated his tidy walls. "Then—piff! All that stage of my development seemed to go like smoke. No, no pain; no physical feeling of any kind except that sudden rush of bodily strength. I just tore myself in two as I'd torn the book, and I ran to my glass—the glass I'd shaved in only a few hours ago."

"And you saw——?" the words broke breathlessly from me.

Slowly he shook his head. "Nothing—that time. *I hadn't been to sleep, you see. A sleep's got to come in between.* That's why you mustn't be here if I go to sleep. . . . No, it was the next morning I saw it."

Faintly I asked him what it was he had seen the next morning.

But before he could reply there had come a sudden wicked glitter into his grey-blue eyes. His hand had once more gone to his upturned coat collar. And he chuckled—chuckled.

"Not *this*, if that's what you mean," he said with a jerk of his head. "That was my last adventure; the one I'm telling you about now was two before that." Then his chuckle dying away again, "You notice your face when you shave, don't you?—the texture of your skin and so on? Well, that was what I saw: just a few years younger, a few years softer, a few years smoother. The corners of your eyebrows here; you know how the brow gets thin at the sides and those sprouts of long hair begin to come? Well, they'd gone. And I was scared at my strength coming back like that. . . . I say, get me a drink, will you? No, no, blast it—not that stuff—plain water."

I got him the water. He gulped it down. His fingertips were still feeling his eyebrows. Then with another spurt:

"What's the time now? Never mind—but I keep a diary now, you see. Have to. Memory isn't to be trusted in a matter of this kind. And speaking of memory, it'll be hell's delight if that goes. You see, this isn't 1920 for me; it's 1910, and I shan't have written *The Hands of Esau* for another three years yet. Or you can call it both 1920 and 1910 if you like. Bit mixing, isn't it? It's demoniac. I call it——" he called it something rather too violent for me to set down, and I have omitted one or two other strong expressions that had begun to creep into his speech. "And just one other thing before I shove you out," he positively raced on. "I said I should die at sixteen. If it comes to the worst I hope to God I shall; none of your scarlet second childhoods for me! But how the Erebus and Terror do I know when sixteen will come? . . . I say, where are you sleeping to-night? Perhaps you'd better—— Have some whisky. If only we had that damned datum point! Do have some whisky. Have the —— lot. Are those curtains drawn? Take my key and lock me in and give it to Mrs Hyems downstairs. Where's that diary of mine?"

Then all in a moment he was on his feet. Without ceremony he had thrust my hat into my hands. Comparatively gently, seeing what his strength was, he was hustling me towards the door.

"Sorry, old man"—the words came thickly—"thanks awfully—I expect I shall be all right—don't bother about me. . . . But I shall have to move sooner or later—looks so dashed queer one man coming in and another going out—too comic if they arrested me on a charge of making away with myself. . . . See you soon—yourself out—quick, if you don't mind—go!"

The next moment I was out on his landing. He had almost carried me out. I heard the locking of his door, but after that, though I listened, nothing.

## V

Presently it occurred to me that there was nothing to be gained by waiting. It did not seem to be an occasion for calling for help, and if there was something he did not wish me to see it was hardly a friend's part to stand there listening for it. Slowly I descended past the closed offices of the cinema and variety agents and let myself out into the street. Involuntarily my eyes went up to his window, but no light showed there, and I remembered that I had drawn his curtains myself. Among a knot of people who waited for omnibuses I stood on the kerb, lost in thought.

It was after eleven o'clock, and Haslemere was now out of the question. I could have got a bed at my Club, but I vaguely felt that there might be something rather more to the purpose to do than that. For some minutes I couldn't for the life of me think what it was. Four o'clock of that afternoon seemed an age ago. . . . Then I remembered. Madge Aird might at least be able to throw a little light on the Daphne Bassett aspect of the affair. She had said she would be at home that evening, and I can always have a bed at the Airds' for the asking.

I mounted a bus, descended at my Club, telephoned to Alec Aird, seized a bag I kept ready packed in town, and by half-past eleven was on my way to Empress Gate.

Alec himself opened the door to me. He was in his dinner-jacket, but had thrust his feet into a comfortable pair of bedroom slippers and was smoking his everlasting bulldog briar pipe. There were neither hats nor coats on the hall table, and he had the air of having the house to himself.

"Thought it would be you," he said. "Lost your train? Give me your bag—I'm scared to death of asking a servant to do anything after dinner these days. Come up."

"Isn't Madge in? She said she was going to be at home."

"Oh, Madge calls it being at home if she's in by midnight. She's only at the Nobles. I don't think she's going on any-

where. Listen"—the click of a key had sounded in the hall—"there she is, I expect."

It was Madge. She followed us up into the drawing-room a moment later, gave me a glance that was half surprised and half amused, and proceeded to unscarf herself. Alec was relighting his pipe with the long twisted-paper poker. There was a question in the eye he cocked at her. Alec is fond of home, and lives a good deal of his social life vicariously, sending Madge to represent him and relying on her account of the proceedings when she gets back. This is frequently lively.

"Oh, nobody much," she chattered. "The Tank Beverleys and the Hobsons, and Connie Fairham and her escapade, and Jock Diver with Mrs Hatchett. Washout of an evening; makes home seem quite nice, especially with George here. Do give me a decent peg; they'd nothing but filthy cup." Then, as Alec busied himself at a tray, she shot another amused glance at me. "Brought the Beautiful Bear, George?"

"I've just left him. I want to talk to you."

"Alec," she said promptly, "go to bed. George and I want to talk."

"Dashed if I do without a tune," Alec grumbled. "Play something."

Madge crossed to the music-stool, set her whisky-and-soda on the sliding rest, and began to play.

I waited in an extreme of impatience. The bus-ride to the Club, getting my bag, coming on to Empress Gate, greeting Alec—I suppose these things had occupied me just sufficiently to put away for half an hour the weight that had been placed upon me; but now, as I frowned at Alec Aird's tiles and cut steel fender, that weight began to reimpose itself. Anxiously I wondered what might be happening at that very moment in that other room with the drawn curtains, the orderly shelves and the disreputable table.

A man who grew younger instead of older! A man who already was ten years younger than he had been a few months ago! He had been quite right in saying, when I had

tried to take him down to Haslemere, that that only meant that I had not yet taken it in. I was as far from being able to take it in as ever. More and more it forced itself on me as menacing, inimical, wild. What sane man could believe it? And yet, if it was not to be believed, why could I not shake it off? Why did it lurk, as it were, in the half-lighted corners of Madge's drawing-room, allowing me all the time I wished in which to demonstrate it to be nonsense, and then, when I had left not one aspect of it uncriticised and undenied, reunite and face me again exactly as before?

It happened, he said, while he slept; and he had strictly enjoined on me that if I saw him falling asleep I was to walk straight out of the place. "There are some things I won't ask even a pal to go through." That meant that during his sleep those tufts of his eyebrows disappeared and that terrifying strength descended on him again. But what happened *before* then? Was the actual and physical change simultaneous with the inner and mental one, or was it merely a confirmation that came afterwards? *Had* he changed in every respect but form and feature even as I had talked to him? It frightened me to think that he had; but the more I thought of it the more it looked like it.

For there had taken place a struggle within him that had but increased in intensity as the minutes had passed. I remembered the gravity with which he had pondered my suggestion that for the stuff of his novels he had been too directly to heaven, too straight to hell. I don't pretend to know any more about heaven and hell than anybody else, but I have the ordinary man's conception of the difference between good and evil, better and worse, and these principles, it seemed to me, had contended in him. And he had striven to throw the weight of his personal will into the worthier scale. There were things he did not wish to re-do, episodes he did not wish to re-live. He had even wept that he must be dislodged from that rock of his life to which his forty-five years had brought him. . . . But what had followed? Suddenly a wicked chuckle. Violent expressions had crept into his speech. A glitter had awakened in his eyes, as if,

since the thing must be gone through with, devilry and defiance were a more manly part than weeping. "Well, if there's no help for it, let's be thorough one way or the other," I could have imagined him grimly saying. . . .

And if this was so, what did it mean but that he *had* actually grown younger before my very eyes? I was merely shown, invisibly and a little in advance, what the whole world would realise when his sleep had smoothed out a few more wrinkles, given a newer gloss to his hair and an added brightness to his eyes. . . .

And in that case why had I come to see Madge Aird? What could Madge do? What could anybody do? If the thing was true it was inescapable. He *must* go back. Not one single stage could be avoided. Beyond these episodes which he dreaded lay others that perhaps he need not dread, and others beyond those, and others beyond those . . . until he attained sixteen. . . .

I continued to muse and Madge to play.

At last Alec got contentedly up. He straightened the creases from his dinner-jacket.

"Thanks, old girl," he said. "Well, I'm going to turn in, and you two can sit up and yarn about your royalties if you like. You look after him, Madge, and see he doesn't get hold of *The Times* before I do in the morning. Night, George. You know where everything is——"

And, refilling his pipe as he went, he was off. Madge drew up a small table between us, untied the ribbons of her cothurnes, rubbed the creases from her ankles, and worked her toes inside their sheath of silk.

"Well?" she said; and then with a little rapturous gush, "I can't get the creature's beauty out of my head! That skin—that hair—and those wonderful books! It isn't fair. It's too many gifts for one person. He ought to be nationalised or something—turned over to the public like a park."

"I want you to tell me who Mrs Bassett is," I said.

She bargained. "It's a swap, mind. If I tell you about her you tell me about him."

"Tell me about her first."



"Well"—she settled herself comfortably—"I'm sorry to see you come down to my own scandalmongering level. Do you want to put her into *Nonentities I Have Known*? If so, I'll Who's-Who her for you. Here goes. Bassett, Daphne, *née* Daphne Wade. O.D. (only daughter, George) of Horatio Wade, rector of somewhere in Sussex, I forget where, but Julia Oliphant will tell you. He, the rector, M. (married) 1, Daphne's mother, and was M.B. (married by) 2, the child's governess. He died in the year of his Lord I forget exactly when, leaving Daphne a little money, otherwise I can hardly see Bassett marrying her. But Hugo pulled it off all right. My broker knows him. He's in the Oil Crush now, but he was playing margins on a capital of twenty pounds when Daphne (excuse my vulgarity) caught the last bus home."

"She's a friend of Miss Oliphant's, is she?"

"She was. She and Julia and Rose were children together. But I'm not sure Julia speaks to her since *The Parthian Arrow*. She meant it for him all right, whether he meant his for her or not. Life's full of quiet humour, isn't it?"

I will abridge a little of my friend's liveliness. Indeed as she caught as it were out of the air something of my own mood, she dropped much of it herself. This was the substance of what she told me:

Derwent Rose had written a book called *An Ape in Hell*. I don't know, Derry never knew, I don't think anybody knows to this day, the real origin of the expression that formed its title; and if I were a syndic of one of these New Dictionaries I think I should frankly confess as much, instead of merely quoting other books as saying that "*A woman who dies without bearing a child is said to lead an Ape in Hell.*" Had I written that book, and in my own way, I think the four corners of the earth would have heard of it; as Derwent Rose had written it, in his way, he had merely achieved a masterpiece for the reading of generations to come. Our contemporary agglomeration (if Mr Goddard is right) of ten and twelve years old intelligences had prac-

tically passed it over. Briefly, the book had to do with the merciless economic pressure that already, in 1910, made it difficult for people to marry in the freshness of their youth, and practically suicidal to have children. I cannot delay to say more of the book. I saw in it nothing but pity and beauty and tenderness and a savage and generous anger, and how anybody could have taken it in any other sense I could not imagine.

Yet one person had done so—a friend of his childhood, the author of *The Parthian Arrow*.

“One moment,” I said when Madge arrived at this point. “There’s one thing that isn’t quite clear. His book came out in 1910. Hers only appeared quite lately.”

“That’s so,” she admitted.

“But nobody brings out a rejoinder ten years after the event.”

“Well—she did. Read the book. Another thing: she started her book immediately his appeared, in 1910.”

“How do you know that?”

“Those sleeves her heroine wears went out in 1910,” was her characteristic reply. “She never even took the trouble to bring them up to date.”

So that the rancour, if there was any, was not only persistent, but seemed to have a curiously desultory quality as well.

“Well—go on,” I said.

But here she broke out suddenly: “But surely, George, even you can see where the *Ape* must have hurt her!”

“As I’ve neither seen the lady nor read her book——”

“But you know what his book’s all about. . . . It was in her childlessness that she felt it.”

“*What!*” I cried. “Is anybody so stupid as to suppose that a man like Derwent Rose would——”

“Wait a bit. Look at it as she sees it. She married at twenty-nine. She’s forty-one now. And nothing’s happened, and nothing’s likely to. They were boy and girl together. Now suppose *I’d* had an affair with somebody in *my* young days, and had married somebody else, and then

he'd gone and—rubbed it in. I don't think I should have written a *Parthian Arrow* even then, but I'm not going to drop dead when I hear that another woman did."

"But—ten years!"

"Doesn't that just prove it?" she cried triumphantly. "If she'd had a baby the first year she'd probably have forgotten all about her book. But when the second year came, and the third, and the fourth—well, thank God I've got my Jennie at school; but I can guess. These things get worse for a woman instead of better as time goes on. And now she's forty-one. I can't say I see very much mystery about those ten years."

"But," I said, "all this rests on the assumption that at one time they were lovers. He certainly didn't speak as if that had been so."

"Ah, then he has spoken of her! What did he say?"

"Just what you'd expect him to say, of course—that he's awfully sick he's upset her without intending to, and wants to explain."

She mused. Then, with the most disconcerting promptitude, she laughed and threw her whole castle down to the ground.

"Well, I suppose I'm wrong. If that was really the colour of the Bear's hide I don't suppose he'd be a friend of yours, and I certainly shouldn't want to meet him. It's because I'm probably wrong that it's so fascinating. I don't want to be right just yet. No, George, all I said this afternoon was that it was an interesting situation, and I defy you to say it isn't. Now tell me lots and lots about him."

But that was impossible. Once more every sane particle in me was beginning to doubt whether I had been in Cambridge Circus that evening at all. Moreover, one other thing had struck me with something of a shock. This was those ten years during which Mrs Bassett had nursed her anger against him. Those ten years, for him, did not exist, or existed only with the most amazing qualifications. As mere time they did not exist, but as experience they did. For him the *Arrow* and the *Ape* were both contemporaneous

and not. In one sense ten years separated them, but in another her retort had come back to him as it were by return of post. Desperately I tried to envisage a situation so utterly beyond reason. I tried to set it out in my mind in parallel columns:

He was thirty-five when he wrote his <i>Ape</i> .	She was thirty-one when she read it and began her rejoinder.
He was forty-five when he read the <i>Arrow</i> .	She was forty-one at the time that he read it.
But he was thirty-five again.	She was still forty-one.
He was going on getting younger.	She would get no younger.
He was convinced he would die at sixteen.	She——

But I had to give it up. It made my head ache. It shocked my sense of the unities. And then fortunately there came a revulsion.

After all (I thought testily) Rose might consider himself a confoundedly lucky fellow. What, after all, was he grumbling at? Because he was going to have his precious, precious youth all over again? His health and vigour and strength all over again, so that he could tear a book in two as I might have torn a piece of paper? His clear skin and glossy hair and the keen sight of his eyes once more? He was luckier than poor Madge and myself! And what, if that American was right, was he risking? Nothing that I could see, unless he should go beyond that age of the maximum of his faculties, which he was persuaded he would not do. And in addition to the approaching brilliance of his youth it was not impossible that he would keep the whole of his accumulated experience as well. Not for him that old and bitter cry that has so often been wrung from the rest of us: "Oh for my life over again, knowing what I know now!"

So far, at any rate, he was having his life again, knowing all he knew at the turning-point. And the fellow was grumbling!

"Now tell me about him," said Madge.

But she could not suppress a yawn as she said it. I knew that she, like myself, was longing to slip out of her clothes and to get into bed.

"Another time," I said, wearily rising. "Which room are you putting me in?"

As she rose I did not notice what it was that she caught up from a side-table and put under her wrap. She preceded me upstairs. The room into which she showed me was one I had occupied before, and only a minor change or two had since been made. One of these caught my eye. It was a leather-framed photograph of Miss Oliphant that stood with the reading-lamp on the bedside table.

"Well, good night," Madge yawned. "They'll bring you tea up. Don't read too long—bad for the eyes and the electric-light bill——"

Then it was that I noticed the book she had quietly slipped on to the table. It was Mrs Bassett's book, *The Parthian Arrow*.

## VI

Part of the fuss my numerous friends made about my Knighthood was this desire of theirs that my portrait should be painted and hung up in the Lyonesse Club. Whether in fact I shall ever look down from those buff-washed walls I am at present unable to say. That rests with Miss Julia Oliphant. I myself merely have the feeling that if she doesn't paint me I hardly wish to be painted.

Her name was not among those originally chosen by the Portrait Committee and submitted to me. It was Madge who, by half-past twelve the following day, had decided to include her. We were walking along together to Gloucester Road Station. Madge was going out to lunch.

"Well, go and see her," she said. . . . "But they ought to have let you sleep on, George. I wish I hadn't left you that book."

"Oh, I'm perfectly fit and fresh. The Boltons, you said? I shall go and see her this afternoon."

"You say you don't know her well?"

"I've met her once."

We entered the station. I took my friend's ticket. I saw her to the gate of her lift, and the attendant paused, his hand on the iron lattice.

"Well," she said, "I think you'll find that won't matter. Let me know how you go on. Good-bye—and you can tell the Bear from me that no decent person believes a word of it."

And with a wave of her hand across the grille she sank with the lift into the ground.

I walked to my Club, lunched alone, and then, in a corner of the smoking-room, busied myself with my rather scanty recollections of the lady I was going to see that afternoon. Though I had only actually met her upon one occasion, we had a sort of hearsay acquaintance in addition. She and Derwent Rose had been children together, and one does not begin quite at the beginning with the friends of one's friends. Moreover, there are these people whom one may actually meet only at wide intervals, but over whom absence does not seem to have its ordinary power. Nothing seems to ice over, you come together again at the point where you left off. Perhaps because you draw your nourishment from the same elements, you are able to take the gaps for granted.

Nevertheless, of my own single personal meeting with Miss Oliphant I could remember little but her eyes. I had been presented to her across a small dinner-table, with rosy-shaded electric candles, that had turned those great eyes pansy-black in the pinky gloom. I had guessed that in the daylight they were of the deep brown kind that, alas, so frequently means glasses for reading and distressing headaches; but what had struck me at the time had been their quiet readiness and familiarity, as if they said to me, "He's

told me about you; I wonder what he's said to you about me!"

And now those same eyes, photographed in a leather frame, had watched me during the whole of the previous night. They had watched me as I had read that awful book. Darkly watchful and expectant, they had seen my first amazed incredulity, then my successive waves of anger. "But go on," they had seemed ever to urge me; "there's much more to come!"

And under the bedside lamp they had been still watching me when the maid had brought in tea and had flung the curtains aside, admitting the bright sunshine.

Then, when the book had dropped from my hand to the floor, they had said, "Don't you think it would be rather a good thing if you were to come to see me?"

I am not going to advertise that hateful book of Mrs Bassett's. If I could have torn it in two as Rose had torn it I should have done so. She had hardly changed his name—for what was "Kendal Thorne" but Derwent Rose? So I will merely say that to old memories she had added new and malicious inventions, and had produced a ridiculous grotesque of a vain and peevish childhood, an impossibly blatant youth, and a culmination born of her own distorted imagination. It was for her, and not for himself, that he had blushed. For her sake he would have torn up every single copy of it if by that means it could never have been. He could have scolded her, shaken her, smacked her, ashamed, angry and helpless as one is before an ill-conditioned child who nevertheless has claims on one. That there could ever have been any passage between them her book put entirely out of the question. And so much for *The Parthian Arrow*.

At half-past three that afternoon I was at the Boltons, ringing Miss Oliphant's bell. A tiny maid admitted me, and I was shown into a sort of alcove with a good deal of tapestry and bric-à-brac and brass about, the sort of things the artists of half a generation ago affected for the sake of their "colour." Nor was the studio into which I was presently shown much different from a hundred other studios I

had seen. These glass-roofed, indigo-blinded, north-lighted wells, I may say, always depress me, and had I to live in one of them I should instantly have a side-window cut, so that I might at least have a glimpse once in a while of somebody who passed in the outer world.

But somehow the place suited Miss Oliphant. Perhaps it was the north light. Artists choose the north light because it varies little, and there was something about her that didn't vary very much either. She came through a portière-hung door, and as she stood there for a moment, not surprised (for I had telephoned that I was coming), but with that familiarity and expectancy once more in her dark eyes, I was able to check this cool and composed impression of her with my former one of over-lustrous eyes in the pinky gloom of the shaded lamps of the dinner-table.

Her hair, like her eyes, was dark; but she had a habit rather than a style of dressing it. It was piled in a high mass over her white brow, quite neatly, but rather as if to have it out of the way and done with than as making the most of its rich glossy treasure. A dateless, but by no means inappropriate tea-gown of filmy grey with a gold thread somewhere in it showed her long harmonious lines of limb and allowed her breasts to be guessed at; and the ripeness of her shoulders set off her long and almost too slender neck. She had cool and beautiful hands, sleeved to the wrist; but the daylight added to her years. At our former meeting I should have said she was thirty-five. Now I saw that she could hardly be less than forty.

She took my hand for a moment, smiled, but without speaking, and began to busy herself at a Benares tray. She reinserted the plug of an electric kettle, which immediately broke into a purr. She listened for a moment with her ear at the kettle, and then suddenly filled the teapot. She spoke, once more smiling, through the little cloudlet of steam.

"Do sit down," she said, indicating a "property" curule chair. "Well, how's Derry? Have you seen him lately?"

I made a note of the name she too called him by, and said,



Yes, I had seen him yesterday. "I'm sorry to say he seemed worried," I added.

"Oh? What's worrying him?" she asked, withdrawing the plug from the wall and popping a cosy over the pot. It was a French cosy, a dainty little porcelain Marie Antoinette, with a sac and a padded and filigreed petticoat, and I remember thinking that if Miss Oliphant ever went to fancy-dress dances the costume of her cosy would have suited her very well.

"Have you read that horrible woman's horrible book?" I asked her point-blank.

"*The Parthian Arrow?* Yes, I've read it," she said equably.

"Well, I should say that's one of the things that's worrying him," I replied. "I've just read it, and the taste of it's in my mouth still."

She considered the teapot. "We'll give it two minutes and then take the bag out," she remarked. Then, "Oh yes, I've read it. I don't think she need have written it either. But it is written, and there's an end of it. As for Derry, anybody who knows him knows that his whole life's been one marvellous mistake after another. He dodges it somehow in his books, but he knows nothing whatever about women in real life. Never did. Sugar?"

This was hardly what Madge Aird had led me to expect. I had gathered from her that Miss Oliphant and Mrs Bassett had more or less fallen out about that book; in fact Madge had definitely said, "I'm not sure that they speak now." But here was Miss Oliphant, Rose's friend, not only quite inadequately angry on the one hand, but on the other talking about Rose's ignorance of women almost as if he had been as much to blame as Mrs Bassett herself. . . . Moreover, when a woman tells a man that another man knows nothing about women, the man who is spoken to invariably tries the words on himself to see whether he too is included in the disparagement. My understanding of Miss Oliphant, such as it was, suddenly failed me. I looked at

her again to see whether, and if so where, I had made a mistake.

She was doing a perfectly innocent little thing, one that at any other time I might have found charming. Her long fingers were slyly lifting the tops of sandwich after sandwich in search of the kind she wanted. A child does the same thing with sweets—and sometimes goes beyond mere peeping. But the infantility of the gesture jarred on me, and jarred no less when, her eyes meeting mine, she laughed, pouted, and said: "Well, after all, I cut them." I did not smile. Her coolness and unconcern when a friend was savagely attacked disappointed me. As for the portrait that was to have been the excuse for my call on her, I was glad now that it hadn't been mentioned. I now doubted whether I should mention it. I had supposed her to be a woman—not merely a female painter who gave a male sitter tea in her studio.

"I don't understand you," I said, a little curtly I'm afraid. "You speak as if that book was a mere point of view to which she's entitled."

Again she smiled at me, as if she liked me very much.

"Well, she has her point of view. It's evident that you don't know Mrs Bassett."

"Her book's told me all about her that I ever want to know."

"So," she laughed, "you're just showing how cross you can be?"

At that moment there came a ring at the bell. She was on her feet instantly, as if to forestall the little maid. With less tact than ever, I thought, her fingertips touched my shoulder lightly as she passed by me. It was only then that I noticed that the Benares tray held a third cup and saucer.

The next moment she had shown Mrs Bassett herself in.

I am going to show Mrs Bassett in and out of this story again with all possible speed. Only once have I set eyes on the lady since, and that was in a moment when I was far too occupied with other matters to give her more than a glance. She came in, a fluff of cendré hair, surmounted by

a hat made of a thousand brilliant tiny blue feathers. This was intended to enhance the pallid blue of her eyes; as a matter of fact it completely extinguished it. She was a Christmas-tree of silver stole and silver muff, toy dog, and a pale blue padded and embroidered object that I presently discovered to be the dog's quilt. I was presented to her, bowed, and—suddenly found myself alone with her. Miss Oliphant had picked up the teapot and was nowhere to be seen.

And this was the kind of arch ripple that proceeded from the author of *The Parthian Arrow*:

“Oh, how d’you do, Sir George? Really a red-letter day. Sir George Coverham and Julia Oliphant together. Quite a galaxy—or is galaxy wrong and does it take more than two to make one, like the Milky Way?—*Oh, Puppetty, my stole!*—You mustn’t mind if I ask you thousands of questions—I always do when I meet distinguished people—peep behind the scenes, eh?—*Puppetty, I shall slap you!*”—a tap on the beast’s boot-button of a nose. “*So handsome, Julia is, don’t you think? Not in a picture-postcard sort of way, perhaps, but such character (don’t you call it?) and such a lovely figure! I know if I were a man I should fall head over ears in love with her! Do you mind, Sir George?*”

She meant, not did I mind falling in love with Miss Oliphant, but did I mind taking the dog’s cradle and quilt from her arms. I did so, made my bow as Miss Oliphant appeared again, and moved quickly towards the alcove where I had left my hat.

But it was Miss Oliphant herself who stopped me, and stopped me not so much by her quietly-spoken words—“I want you to stay”—as by the sudden command in her eyes. This was quite unmistakable. For the first time since I had entered her studio I saw the woman I had expected to see. That look was too imperious altogether to disobey. I sat down again.

I swear that Mrs Bassett wore that silver stole twenty different ways in as many minutes. The air about her was ceaselessly in motion. If Puppetty was in his quilted cradle

she had him out; if he was out she put him back again and tucked him in. She kissed and scolded the wretched beast, and discussed Miss Oliphant's pictures and my own books. Only her own book she never once mentioned. And I sat, saying as little as possible, looking from one to the other of the two women.

Then, out of the very excess of the contrast between them, light began to dawn on me. All at once I found myself saying to myself, "This can't be what it appears to be. There's something behind it all. Look at them sitting there, and believe if you can that the one who's pouring out tea couldn't, for sheer womanliness, eat the other alive! Look at her! She's a whole packed-full history behind her, and one that's by no means at an end yet. It radiates from every particle of her. Of course Miss Oliphant cares just as much as you do when her friend's attacked. She's a different way of showing it, that's all. See if she isn't putting that other one through her paces now, and for your benefit. She's not keeping you here without a reason. Sit still and watch."

I repeat that I said this to myself.

And from that moment I knew I was on the right track.

At last Mrs Bassett rose to go. I assure you that I was on my feet almost before she was, for I knew that my talk with Miss Oliphant was not now to be resumed—it was to begin. The author of *The Parthian Arrow* was piled up with quilts, cradles and Pupperty again, and I need say no more about the thickness of her skin than that she gave me her telephone number and asked me to go and see her. I bowed, and Julia Oliphant towered over her as she showed her out.

Seldom in my life have I held a door open for a woman with greater pleasure.

The outer door closed, and Miss Oliphant reappeared and crossed slowly to the settee. I now knew beyond all doubt that I was right. She seemed suddenly exhausted. She passed her hand wearily over those too-lustrous eyes. List-

lessly she told me to smoke if I wanted to. Then she continued to sit in silence.

At last she roused a little. She turned her eyes on me.

"Well—now you've seen the author of *The Parthian Arrow*."

I made no remark.

"And," she continued, "you did exactly as I expected—exactly what a man would do."

"What was that?"

"You'd one look, and then you turned away."

"One look was enough."

"Oh, you all think you've got rid of a thing when you've turned your backs on it. That's the way men quarrel. 'Oh, So-and-So's a bounder; blackball him and have done with it.' And so long as he isn't in your Club he doesn't exist for you."

I pondered, my eyes on her old-fashioned studio-trappings. "Well, say that's a man's way of defending his friend. What's a woman's?"

Our eyes met once more, and I knew a very great deal about Miss Julia Oliphant by the time she had uttered her next six words.

"A woman has her to tea," she replied.

Then, as if something within her would no longer be pent up, she broke into rapid speech.

"Oh, I know you men! You're all too, too kind! Forgive me if I say I think you like the feeling. It pleases you, and you don't stop to think that it puts all the more on us. You make your magnificent gesture, but we have to go round picking up after you. Do you think I'd let that woman out of my sight? . . . But I'm sorry I had to trick you a little."

"To trick me?"

"Yes, when you first came in. I saw you were puzzled and—disappointed in me. You see, when a person's coming to tea and may be here any moment you have to keep some sort of hand on yourself. It isn't the time to indulge your

real feelings. So I took no chances. I'm sorry if I threw you off the track. . . . Well, you've seen her, and you've read her book. Tell me where you think the toy dog comes in."

She was speaking vehemently enough now. She did not give me time to reply.

"I'll tell you. You and Derry—all the decent men—a toy dog fetches you every time. You're all so, *so* kind! You see tragedies and empty cradles and all the rest of it straight away. And perhaps once in a while you're right. But you can take it from me you're wrong this time. I've known her all my life, and I don't believe she ever for a single moment wanted a child. She'd never have put up with the bother of one. So Derry's worrying all about nothing. All that sticks in her throat is that she imagines she's been pilloried as not being able to have one. Her vanity was hurt, not her motherhood at all. Now that she's got rid of that bookful of bile I think she's a perfectly happy woman. Her days are just one succession of shopping and matinées and calls and manicuring and Turkish baths and getting rid of Bassett's money. It was just the same during the war—flag-days and driving convalescents about, and bits of canteen-work and committees by the score. . . . Oh, Derry needn't worry his head; tragedy's quite out of the picture! Let's have the truth. No weeping Niobe—just scents and powders and Puppetty and an imaginary grievance—that's her."

I think it is my own sex that is the merciful one, at any rate to woman. Man has made radiant veils for her, has shut his eyes to this or that stark aspect of her, because the world has to go on by his efforts and he cannot afford to begin his scheme of things all over again every time he sees the red light of the prime in a woman's eyes. Julia Oliphant had spoken cruelly, ruthlessly, without decency; and I now knew why. No woman cares that a wrong is done in the abstract. Her bitterness and hate ever mean that someone dear to her has been subjected to indignity and pain. And suddenly I rose from my seat, crossed to the settee, and, sitting down by Julia Oliphant's side, did a thing I am not

in the habit of doing upon a short acquaintance. I took both her hands into mine.

With as little hesitation as I had taken them her fingers closed on mine. And I fancied the quick strong pressure answered the question I was going to ask her before ever my lips spoke it. It had all been there months before—all prepared and promised in that first steady intimate look across the rosy-shaded candles of that dinner-table. I spoke quite quietly.

“Isn’t there something I’d better know—and hadn’t you better tell me now?” I said.

Again that firm cool pressure of the fingers. The tired eyes looked gratefully into mine.

“I always knew you’d be like that if only——”

“Then tell me. Because when you’ve done I’ve something to tell you.”

God knows what fires were instantly ablaze in the depths of the eyes.

“About him?” broke instantly from her lips.

“You tell me first.”

The fires died down, and the voice dropped again.

“Tell you? I don’t mind telling you. . . . Of course; all my life; ever since we were children together. Not that he ever gave me a thought. But that made no difference.”

And having said it she had said all. I saw the beginning of the fires again. She went straight on. “Now what were you going to tell me?”

Remember it was not yet eighteen hours since Derwent Rose had thrust me out of his door, torn between an angel and a devil within himself. But what are eighteen hours to a man who has two scales of time? To him they might represent years of experience. He had clung desperately to his better man, but—who knew?—already he might be less accessible to the angelic. If I was not already too late, to catch him while he was of that same mind and will was the important thing. If this woman who had just told me with such touching simplicity that she had loved him all her life was indeed his good angel, it seemed to me that here was

her work waiting for her. I saw her as none the less loving that she could vehemently hate for the protection of her love. That she would fly to him the moment her mind grasped his story I had not an instant's doubt. Nor did I stop to consider that I might be betraying something he did not wish known. It was no time for subtleties. Remembering his anguish, I did not think he would refuse any help that was to be had. Here by my side was his cure if cure there was to be found.

Still with her hands in mine, I took my plunge.

The first time she interrupted me was very much where I had interrupted him. She wanted to know, apart from mere imaginary changes that might have been due to variable health, what visible proofs there were of all this. I wished to spare her those two ( )'s on Rose's neck, but she smiled ever so faintly.

"Yes, you're all nice dears. But I know perfectly well the kind of thing it might be. So don't let that trouble you. It's important, you know."

So I told her. She merely nodded. "He never did know anything about women," she said. "Go on."

Her next interruption came when I spoke of his tearing the book, though this was more of a confirmation than a true interruption.

"He was a perfectly glorious athlete," she remarked calmly, "but he always hated pot-hunting, and later of course his books interfered with his training a good deal. I remember once . . . but never mind. I wonder if we shall have all that over again?"

"Then you've managed to swallow the monstrous thing so far?" I said in wonder.

"I told you his life had been one marvellous mistake after another. Go on," she replied.

But as I proceeded her calm became less and less assured. I was purposely omitting from my account such elements as might tend to agitate her, but she seemed to divine this, and perhaps she thought I suppressed more than I did. Suddenly she broke out:



"Never mind all that about ratios. I don't know anything about ratios. The point is, when does he expect the next—attack?"

"I hardly know—I rather think——" I began, now quite violently holding her hands, which she had tried to withdraw. She had also attempted to rise.

"Soon? A month? A week? To-morrow?" she demanded.

"He's not sure himself, but I'm rather afraid——"

She allowed me to say no more. She plucked her hands from mine and ran out of the studio. I heard the single faint "ting" of a telephone-receiver being lifted from its fork, and a moment later, "Is that the taxi-rank? The Boltons—Miss Oliphant—as quick as you can."

Three minutes later she reappeared. She had thrown a wrap over her tea-gown, and was hurriedly tying a scarf under her chin.

"Isn't that taxi here yet? How long should it take from here to Cambridge Circus?"

"Twenty or twenty-five minutes."

"You'd better come with me. You can tell me the rest on the way. . . . What a time he is taking! Wouldn't it be quicker to pick one up outside? Listen—no, that's only letters. Perhaps the man's waiting and hasn't rung—let's wait at the street entrance—here's your hat——"

She opened the inner door, kicked aside the letters on the floor, and sped along the corridor. The taxi glided up as we reached the entrance.

The next minute we were on our way.

The streets were full and our progress was slow. People were hurrying to their homeward tubes, running along in knots of a dozen or a score at the tails of the slowing-down omnibuses.

"Surely there ought to be a quicker way than along Oxford Street at this hour!" she exclaimed petulantly. Then she threw herself back in the corner. Apparently she had forgotten all about the rest of my story. One idea and one only possessed her—haste, haste. I am perfectly sure that

had she been in the driver's seat not an uplifted blue and white cuff in London would have stopped her.

And her restlessness communicated itself to me. I too felt that in talking to Madge Aird the previous evening, in reading that wretched book all night, in not having told Miss Oliphant straight away what I had to say, I had lost precious time. Some step ought to have been taken quicker—immediately——

“Damn!” I said as another extended arm stopped us; and Julia Oliphant sank back, biting her lip.

Then an endless wait at the corner of Charing Cross Road. . . .

But even that taxi-drive had to come to an end.

“It's just near here, isn't it?” she asked, her hand on the door; and I sprang out. It would be quicker to walk the last few yards. These few yards, however, nearly cost Miss Oliphant her life, for I only just succeeded in dragging her out of the way of a newsboy's bicycle that darted like a minnow from behind a heavy dray. We stood at Rose's door.

I pressed the button of his bell, which was the third of a little vertical row of four; but even as I did so I noticed something unusual about its appearance. The little brass slip that bore his name had gone. I was unable to say whether it had been there on the previous evening, as he himself had admitted me, but gone it was now, and from certain indications it seemed not to have been unscrewed, but wrenched off. My heart sank, but I was careful to conceal from Miss Oliphant the foreboding I felt.

“He may be out,” I muttered. “I'll ring for the house-keeper.”

To fetch Mrs Hyems up from her basement took more time, but at last she appeared, and a look of mingled perplexity and relief came into the eyes that met mine.

“Mr Rose?” I said.

“Aren't you the gentleman as came last night, sir?” she said. “Didn't he go out with you? I heard you come down;

about eleven o'clock it would be; and he didn't seem to be not a minute after you——"

"Hasn't he been back since?"

"I can't make it out, sir. He hasn't been to bed, and there was a note for me on his table this morning. Paid all up he has, but not a word about his milk nor his washing nor his letters nor when he's coming back. And he left his door open, which that isn't his way. Perhaps you'd like to come up, sir?"

We followed her up the stairs. His door still stood wide open, and as far as I could see his room was exactly as I had left it last night. The medicine-ball still lay where it had rolled on the floor, the cushions of the sofa still bore the imprint of his body. I turned to the caretaker.

"You say he's paid you, Mrs Hyems?"

"To the end of the week, sir, except for his washing and ceterer."

"And he's left no address?"

"No more than I tell you, sir."

"Then," I said briskly, "I should just tidy his room and close his door. He'll probably be back to-night. If he isn't let me know. Here's my address."

But as I said it I seemed to see again those marks where his name-plate had been. Derry always carried, suspended in his trousers-pocket by a little swivelled thong, one of those fearsome-looking compendium knives that consist of half a dozen tools in one. The plate had not been unscrewed; what he had done had been to thrust one of these blades behind it and to rip it bodily from its bed. I pictured it all only too clearly. Myself carefully watched out of the way—a cheque hurriedly written—a gulp of whisky perhaps and the call of the streets—a dash downstairs with his door left open behind him—a minute's feverish work over the plate. . . . He had left his books, his papers, his furniture, his medicine-ball. But his name he had taken away, and I did not think that those rooms in Cambridge Circus would see Derwent Rose's face any more.



PART II  
THE STERN CHASE



## I

*Lost:* A man with a brass name-plate in his pocket, probably bent in wrenching. Personal appearance difficult to describe, because something has happened to him that does not happen to the generality of people. When last seen appeared to be about thirty-five, but may look younger. Was wearing dark blue suit and shirt with torn neckband.

*Missing:* Derwent Rose, novelist, late of 120 *bis*, Cambridge Circus, W.C. Age forty-five, tall and very strongly built, eyes grey-blue, hair chestnut-brown, strikingly handsome features. In possession of money, as his banking account was closed the morning after his disappearance. Served with Second Battalion Royal Firthshire Fusiliers. Is thought not to have left the country.

*For Disposal:* Quantity of black oak furniture, comprising Jacobean oval table with beaded edge (copy), six upright chairs, tallboy, chest; also large brass bedstead, drawers, two pairs heavy damask curtains, crockery, plate, etc., etc. Also several thousand volumes, including small collection medical works, and others Curious and Miscellaneous. The whole may be viewed at 120 *bis*, Cambridge Circus, W.C. Apply Caretaker.

So the announcements might have run had there been any; but there were none. I saw to that. The police are excellent people, but I considered this a little out of their line and did not call them in. As for the furniture and effects, they remained for the present where they were, I paying his rent and putting his key into my pocket. As for Derwent Rose, novelist, aged forty-five, it might be months before anybody missed him, and it would be supposed that he had gone into

retirement to write a book. As for the man with the torn neckband and the brass name-plate in his pocket, a prudent person would be a little careful how he tried to identify him. You see what I mean. Julia Oliphant and myself were in a class apart; we should know him on sight, since we knew what had happened to him and what we might expect. But nobody else knew, nobody in the whole wide world. Therefore they would be wise to look at him twice before accosting him. Nobody wants to be certified and locked up, and that was what might conceivably happen if anybody insisted too much on resemblance or identity in the case of a man who was obviously fifteen or twenty years younger than he could be proved to be. Much safer to call the fancied resemblance a coincidence and let it go at that.

Therefore—exit Derwent Rose, novelist, aged forty-five. And enter in his stead—who?

Exactly. That was the whole point. He had not entered. He was somewhere on Life's stage, but behind, or in the wings, or up in the flies, or down underneath the traps. He was his own understudy, but whatever lines he spoke, whatever gestures he made, happened "off." The call-boy ran hither and thither calling his name, but in vain. Oblivion had taken him. It had taken him so completely that he needed to dress no part, to alter himself with no make-up. He was as free to walk about in the limelight as you or I. Freer—far freer—

For where was the birth certificate of this man who had lost ten years in a few months and for all anybody knew might now have lost another ten—twelve—twenty? Of what use was his *dossier* in the Military Records Office? Of what value was his name on the register, his will if he had made one, his signed contracts, his insurance policy? Of what validity was the photograph on his passport, or who could call him into Court as a witness? What clergyman or Justice of the Peace could certify that he had known him for a number of years? What musty and mendacious file in Somerset House dare produce a record to show that a man who was obviously so many years younger had been born



in the year 1875? Free, this Apollo for beauty and Ajax for strength? As far as documents were concerned he was more than free. He had side-stepped them all, and was the only completely free man alive.

But he was not free from Julia Oliphant and myself, for we knew all about it. His own brother he might fool, had he had one; he might delude the nurse who had rocked him as a child were she still alive; but us he could not deceive. With us his unimaginable alibi would not serve nor his unique anonymity go down. If he wished to know us, he could come up to us (but to us only) with a proffered hand and an ordinary "How do you do." But if he did not wish to know us he had us to fear. We knew his secret.

But nobody else—nobody in the whole round world else.

## II

That, in its essence, and speaking very roughly, was the position; but it is worth examining a little more particularly. I will leave aside for the moment such questions as why we wanted to find him, whether we ought to try to find him, whether, if a man chose to expunge his identity like that he had not a perfect right to do so. I will assume that he was to be sought and found. On that assumption I reasoned as follows:

Here—somewhere—was a man of unknown age and uncertain personal appearance. When last seen he was, and looked, thirty-five, but he may now be, and look, any age up to, or rather down to, sixteen. That depended entirely on the rate of those backward jerks of which he himself had failed to find the ratio. But where begin to look for him? At what Charing Cross or Clapham Junction, where all the world passes sooner or later, wait for him? What tube station watch? Round what street corner lurk? Examine it, I say, a little more closely.

And take first his two scales of time. As a matter of incontrovertible fact he was living in the year 1920. In the

year 1920 a big and handsome and athletic man was living a daily life, presumably somewhere in London. But for him that year was 1910, and continually, day by day and hour by hour, he must be struggling to reconcile those two periods. It could make no difference that he knew that he was living in both years simultaneously. A hundred times a day he might say to himself, "I quite understand; this is both 1910 and 1920; I've got them perfectly clear and separate in my head." But the hundred-and-first time would catch him tripping. He would stumble over some sudden and unexpected trifle. Let me make this clear by means of a small incident that happened to myself. Not long ago I walked into Charbonnel's for a cup of tea, and was passing through the shop on the ground floor and about to mount the stairs when I was politely fetched back. I was told, with a smile that might have been given to a man just returned from Auckland or Mesopotamia, that the upper room had been closed for some time. I had not been in Charbonnel's since the early days of the war, and was looking, in 1920, for a Charbonnel's that had ceased to exist.

So Derwent Rose, however much he was on his guard, would once in a while find himself looking for something that no longer existed.

Next, there was the question of money—common money, and how much of it he had got. Obviously, and supposing he was to be found, it was no good looking for him in places where he could not possibly afford to be. He would be found in a cheaper place or a more expensive one according to the state of his purse. I had no means of knowing how much money he had withdrawn from the bank. I had never known much about his finances except that sometimes he had been hard-up, at others comparatively "flush," but that he had never, as far as I knew, borrowed. Thus the vulgarest of all considerations had an important bearing on our very first step: Where to look for him?

Next there was to be considered a combination of these things—the factor of money-plus-time. Say he had drawn one hundred pounds or five hundred pounds from the bank

—for all I knew it might have been either, or more, or less. Well, we all know that a sum that was sufficient for a man in 1910 does not go very far in 1920. There has been a war. . . . So was he haunting expensive places, having (as might have been said of anybody but him) “a short life and a gay one,” or would he be found spinning out his Bradburys as long as possible on a modester scale? Nay, was he even living on his capital at all? Was it not possible that he had found employment of some kind? If so, of what kind? They ask few questions about identity at the dock-gates; was that it, and was he to be looked for in a workman’s early-morning tram? Or had he, a man without a shred of paper to be his warranty, managed to talk somebody into something bigger, and was he one of these ephemeral Business Bubbles, lording it for a few months in somebody else’s car and floating the higher because of the hotness of the air inside him? I did not think, by the way, that either of these last two things was very likely; but nothing was more impossible than anything else, and I am merely trying to show the size of the haystack in which we must hunt for our needle.

The merest glance at the problem made it plain that the only starting point was his last actually-known age—thirty-five. All else was the blindest guesswork. And it was equally plain that the best likelihood of finding him lay in the chance that he would more or less repeat (or seek to repeat) his former experiences at that age. Past associations might pull him, he might frequent some places rather than others, some persons or class of persons rather than others. The question was, could his life at thirty-five be so reconstructed that this hope should not be too slender? That was my idea, and I began to ransack my memory in search of indications that might further it.

But almost from the start I despaired. Sketched thus airily the thing had a deluding look of logic and simplicity; but the first contact with actuality scattered all to the winds again. For example, I have hinted at an echo of an earlier wildness that had for some reason or other overtaken him again at thirty-five; but when I came to examine it I found

that I knew almost nothing at all about it. He had always had the decency to keep these things very much to himself. I had not the vaguest idea of who his companions had been, what his haunts. Added to this was the difficulty that I was approaching the question in reverse. He had slept since I had last seen him, and, sleeping, had presumably once more slipped back. But how far back? He might be (so to speak) at the crest of the wave, farther back still at the beginning of it, or even past it altogether—no longer the man of *An Ape in Hell*, but him of *The Vicarage of Bray*. It was even not impossible that he was sixteen and dead. . . . So all that I could do was to nail myself firmly down to thirty-five and as much of him at that time as I could remember or ascertain.

And instantly the question loomed up largely: "What about Julia Oliphant? Hadn't she better be left out of this, at any rate for the present?"

Now my position in the world practically forces the conventional attitude on me. All things considered, I think I should adopt that attitude in any case, for I have only to look at any other one and my hesitation doesn't last long. But at the same time I do go to lectures on such subjects as Relative and Absolute Age, and in other things, as I have explained, I liked at that time to keep in step and abreast. I have even made an attempt to understand the mystery that is called the Thermionic Valve.

But neither valve nor age theory is newer or stranger to me than the change that seems to have come over the sex-relationship during these last years. I trust that on the whole I manage to maintain a happy medium—it is the dickens of a thing to have sprung on one latish in life—but I only know that I myself, old-fashioned as I am, sometimes find myself discussing with the nicest women, and as freely as I should discuss them with a man, the—may I say the "rummest" subjects? And as for Julia Oliphant's attitude to all this newness, I will only say that while she might have been ten years behind Madge Aird in matters of dress, she was not ten minutes behind her in anything else.

But discussions "in the air" with her were one thing, but discussions of an actual Derwent Rose at thirty-five quite another. "Oh, I know perfectly well the sort of thing it *might* have been, so don't let that worry you," she had said, and for once, just once, I had had to be precise. But once was enough. Call it the old fossil in me if you will, but it makes a very great difference when a woman has said, as simply as Julia had spoken, "Of course; all my life; not that he ever gave me a thought, but that doesn't matter."

For those few words had placed us, instantly and beyond all recall, on a footing of the last intimacy. They had revealed her once for all, and the matter need never be referred to between us again. And as to a swimmer the wavelet that slaps his face and fills his mouth with salt is of more importance than all the immensities below, so we kept to the level of the trifles of life. Often, at a word or a look, we were ready to quarrel. Perhaps, in view of those still depths beneath, our bickering was a necessity and a refuge.

### III

That there was much of my search that I should have to conduct without her was definitely brought home to me on the very first evening when I took a stroll through the region of the West End theatres, still wearing the suit I had worn all day. I ought to say that as I was paying his rent for him I had allowed myself the use of his rooms, and for the present 120 *bis*, Cambridge Circus, was one of my addresses. There was always the chance that he might have forgotten something in 1920 of which he had need in 1910, and that he might steal in, if only for a moment, any dark night when things were quiet.

It was a beautiful London evening, not quite twilight. A tender after-glow lay over the Circus, and, if jewels can grow, the lamps might have been jewels a few moments after their birth. It was one of those evenings when you delay even to dine, knowing that when you come out again

the glamour will have gone and you will have seen a loved and familiar thing once more and once less. So I strolled, scanning faces, sometimes remembering what I was scanning them for, sometimes forgetting again. It might happen that I should find myself suddenly looking into his face. Of course the chances were millions to one that I should not.

I walked as far as the Hippodrome, and then turned and crossed the road. Even in those few minutes the sky was no longer the same. It was mysteriously bluer, and the soft crocus-quality of the lamps had gone. I found myself opposite a doorway with a coronet of lights over it and a tall commissioner beneath them. A man had just gone in. He was not in the least like Rose, and there was no reason why I should have followed him more than any other man; but I did follow him, not into the bright and crowded and smoky ground-floor room of which I had a glimpse, but up a staircase with brass-edged treads and the word "Lounge" at the bottom of it. I found myself in an empty upper room with leather-covered sofas set deeply into the walls, numerous little tables with green-tiled tops, and a small quadrant of a bar in one corner. The man I had followed was already at this bar, and the young woman behind it was preparing his drink.

"Bit quiet, isn't it?" I heard him say. He had rather a pleasing sort of face, of the kind that a year or two ago one associated with the brimmed hat of an Australian trooper. "Say, is this the best London can do for a man nowadays?"

"London nowadays!" the young woman declared with contempt. "I should say so! Where've *you* been this long time? Where the bluebottles go to in the winter I suppose. Don't you know this is a tea-room now?"

"Go on!"

"A tea-room, I tell you. Ladies not admitted after five. The new sign'll be up to-morrow. Oh, you can bring your old grannie here now!"

"Bit different from Stiff Brown's time then!"

"Different!—"

The conversation continued, in the same sense. It was

precisely my Charbonnel's experience over again. Whatever notoriety the place might once have possessed, it was now a perfectly reputable resort, a tea-room in the afternoons, and in the evenings to all intents and purposes the equivalent of my own Club. The woman behind the bar wore a wedding ring, and I distinctly liked the look of her companion. And yet, with dramatic suddenness, the whole prospect before me seemed to be all at once illimitably enlarged.

For if a normal man like my friend at the counter was struck by the changes of the past five years, how must they strike a man who had gone through an experience so utterly abnormal as that of Derwent Rose? Change is the normal condition of all things; the human mind is marvellously able to adapt itself to altered circumstances in a week, a day, an hour; memories lose their fresh edge, novelties amuse and give way to newer novelties still. But all this is only for men who march forward with their fellows. For the man who marches backwards all is turned round. The memories stir and revive and bloom again, the forgotten is re-remembered, laid ghosts begin to walk. The dulled brass edges of staircases become bright again with the rubbing of light and frail and vanished feet, recessed sofas in upper rooms thrill and rustle with whispers and frou-frou and laughter again. Doubtless the living, 1920 successors of those ghosts were to be found elsewhere, but unless I sought Derry in 1910 I knew not where to begin to look for him. Musingly I descended the stairs and walked slowly back towards the Criterion again. I no longer watched faces. The whole thing seemed hopeless. I had about as much chance of finding Derwent Rose in London as I had of catching one given drop of a summer shower.

And then, in that very moment, I saw him.

Or rather it was the hansom that I saw first. It had just started forward with the release of the traffic opposite Drew's, at the top of Lower Regent Street.

Now a hansom in Piccadilly Circus to-day is perhaps not the rarity that a sedan-chair would be; nevertheless hansoms

are comparatively few, and therefore conspicuous. The padded leaves of this one were thrown back, and before I saw him I had already seen a white-sheathed ankle and a white satin slipper.

Then he leaned forward for a moment.

It was unmistakably he.

The hansom passed along with the stream.

Unmistakably he—and yet, mingled with the perfect familiarity, there was a change that I could not immediately analyse. Then (I am telling you what flashed instantaneously through my mind in that fraction of time before I had dashed after him)—then I had it! Familiar, yet not altogether familiar! Of course!—

*His beard!*

At one time in the past Derwent Rose had worn a beard, the softest sprouting of curling golden-brown. In certain lights it had been little more than a glint that had scarcely hid the contours beneath, and it had made him the living image of Du Maurier's drawings of Peter Ibbetson. He now had that young beard again, and he and it and the hansom with the white satin slippers in it had disappeared behind a bus opposite Swan and Edgar's.

I dashed across to the island and dodged in front of the nose of a horse; but I could not see the hansom. There were four directions in which it could have gone: up Regent Street, Glasshouse Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, or east past the Pavilion. Then a taxi slowed down immediately in front of me, and I found myself standing on the step of it, holding the door open with one hand and with the other pointing past the driver's head.

"That hansom in front—follow that hansom——"

We tried Regent Street first, for I remember seeing the revolving doors of the Piccadilly; but no hansom was to be seen. I thrust my head out of the window again.

"Quick—turn—try Shaftesbury Avenue," I cried.

He turned, but not quickly. It was a good two minutes before we reached the Grill Room entrance of the Monico. Then I lost my temper.



"A *hansom*, man—damn it, a *hansom*! Can't you follow the only *hansom* left in London? Ask that man on point-duty——"

But I got the impression that the police do not look with too much favour on roving orders to follow other vehicles to unspecified addresses. The constable was curt.

"There was a *hansom* a minute ago. If you've got his number try Scotland Yard. Come along, you can't stop here——"

I sank back cursing. In the very moment when pure chance had given him to me I had lost him again. By this time he was probably half a mile away. There was nothing whatever to be done.

"Where to now?" grunted the driver.

Nothing to be done—nothing whatever.

"Cambridge Circus, 120," I said.

As well there as anywhere else. He might just possibly be on his way there. He still had a key the duplicate of which was in my own pocket.

I descended at Cambridge Circus, let myself in and mounted to his rooms. He was not there, for no light showed under the door. I switched on, hung up my hat in his little recess, and sat down on his sofa. Then, mortified, but trying to tell myself that I was not actually any worse off, I sought to dissect that momentary impression of him that was all that remained to me.

A *hansom*, and his beard again! That antiquated black-mutton-chop-shape balanced on two spidery wheels, and that fair and tender sprouting! Both were anachronistic, and yet there was a certain suitability about both. Comparatively few young Englishmen have beards nowadays, but then comparatively few young Englishmen are in their forties and their thirties at the same time. He had always looked handsome in his beard, rather like something from a Greek or Roman gallery come to life again, and so he was right to have let it grow. As for the *hansom*, he might have taken it merely because it was the last vehicle left on the rank, refused by everybody else, or there might have been a

subtler reason for his choice. A brown-gold beard and a hansom! Yes, both were "in the picture."

But neither beard nor hansom helped me to what I most anxiously wanted to know—how far back in years he had now gone. In the ordinary way a beard may make a young man look older; but then Rose was paradoxically younger than he was. He might now be twenty-five who looked thirty-five because of the beard, or he might be thirty-five looking precisely that age.

I would have given fifty pounds at that moment for one long, steady look at him in a good light.

However, certain things were in their way reassuring: He was in London, and apparently he was not avoiding its most central places. He had worn a hat of soft grey velours that I had not seen before, and a new-looking, well-cut jacket of grey cheviot. As he had disappeared in navy-blue, he thus had money to spend on clothes. He had further looked in magnificent health, and a man who has health, money, youth and a pretty satin-slipped foot near his own has a number of very good things indeed. I might therefore dismiss the workmen's-tram and dock-gates side of the affair. If Derwent Rose was not having a good time he ought to have been.

And yet at the same time I was uneasy. I will not put on any airs about the reason for my uneasiness. White satin slippers in hansoms had very little to do with it, and tea-rooms that had once been something else even less. These are ordinary everyday things, and there must be something wrong with the eyes of a man who does not see them at every turn—I had almost added something wrong with the mind of a man who magnifies these beyond their proper importance. But when you propose to find a friend by a process of reconstruction of the past phases of his life, you must be prepared for a shock or two; and what I did now begin extraordinarily to resent, among these vulgar and everyday things, was Rose's not being a vulgar everyday man.

For what had the author of *The Hands of Esau* and *The Vicarage of Bray* to do with all this? True, he had been in

it, whether of it or not, as we can none of us shake off the trammels of the flesh until we do so once for all; but the only Derwent Rose with whom properly I had any concern was the man who, into whatever suspect place he had penetrated, had kept something fair and secret and unsullied all the time.

Yet here I was, proposing to look for what was precious and enduring in him, yet prepared to set (as it were) my trap with the grossest possible bait. I was going to catch the best of him by means of the worst, and was deliberately and cold-bloodedly laying my plans to that end.

I flushed at the thought; and then I found myself growing angry with him also. Suddenly I resented the fact that he was alive at all. Why, instead of having contracted this nightmare of a thing that he had contracted, couldn't he have died? Why couldn't he have got himself killed in the war? We respect the decency of the dead; why must I violate his, who had chosen this extraordinary alternative to death? Was this the way to write a friend's epitaph? Must immortelles of this common and saddening mortality be laid on his unlocated grave? Why not write him off—treat him as dead—give up a search that honoured neither him nor me—go back to Julia and tell her that the thing simply couldn't be done?

It seems to me, knitting my brows there that night in his room, that I could do nothing better than that.

But precisely there was the dickens of it. He was *not* dead. How regard a man as dead whom you have seen in the flesh not an hour before? Dead? He was alive, well-dressed, driving a woman somewhere in a hansom, and certainly looking as if he ate four square meals a day and enjoyed them. *Had* he been dead, well and good; but since he was about as alive as a man could be, the tombstone virtues I was concocting to his memory looked unpleasantly like a sentimental shirking of the whole question. They reminded me of hypocrite mourning, with a drop of something warm with sugar to take the edge off the grief. They looked as if I wanted to have him off my mind, to feel luxuriously about him, to be able to say to myself, "This

friend of mine was a good and exemplary man"—and then perhaps at any moment to hear his step behind me, that of a man not good or exemplary in this sense at all. I seemed to hear him softly laughing at me: "So *that's* the yarn you're going to put about, is it: that I was all barley-sugar and noble prose? But let me tell you that Shakespeare and I hit on some of our best notions with a mug of beer in our hands! Great stuff, beer; nearly as good as music. . . . Don't be a humbug, George."

So it looked as if I was for seeking him only in the politer places, knowing all the time that I should not find him there; and I reflected a little bitterly that had the boot been on the other leg he would have known where to look for me. He would have walked straight into the first place where easy-going people take the softest way with one another, give praise for praise, and by and by get knighthoods for it. He would have looked for me there. And he would have had an excellent chance of finding me.

I hope I have not wearied you with these quasi-heroics about friendship. They were dispelled quickly enough. Suddenly there happened something that arrested the beating of my heart.

I heard the sound of feet on the stairs outside. They were accompanied by a woman's soft laugh and a man's deeper muttering.

My skin turned crisp with fright. I am afraid I lost my head as completely as ever I lost it in my life. Friendship or no friendship, I gave him the benefit of not one single doubt. If he was coming in there was one thing to do and one only—to make a dash and get away out of it.

Again I heard the laugh. It came from the landing immediately below. A step or two higher, and——

I sprang to the electric light and switched it off.

The little curtained hat-and-coat recess stood just within the door. I made a tiptoe leap for it. As I did so I remembered with thankfulness one of the recess's peculiarities. It abutted so close up to the door-frame on the side where the lock and handle were that Rose had had the switch moved

to the other side. The opening door would therefore be between him and the switch. That would be my moment. He would see my things scattered about his room the moment he turned on the light, but that could be explained later. To get away was the urgent thing.

Violently agitated, the curtains grasped in my hand, I stood prepared to make my spring. The feet had stopped outside the door. I heard the striking of a match. I waited for the touch of the key on the lock.

Then, "What, up again?" I heard the man's voice say. . . .

The feet passed on to the floor above. I never knew who lived there. Rose's bell was the third of four, counting from the bottom.

#### IV

I have not told you the foregoing because I am proud of it. At the best I had behaved childishly, at the worst—but we will come to that presently. Had it really been he I should probably not have had the remotest chance of ever getting past him. He would have vaulted a handrail in the dark, taken a flight in two bounds, and would have had his hand—that hand that tore books in two—on my neck. Had he recognised me he would have wanted to know what the devil I was doing in his rooms. Had he failed to recognise me I should as likely as not have gone through the window. One takes risks when one intrudes on the loves of the giants.

At the same time, I will do myself the justice to say that physical risks were not my first consideration. Vast as his strength was, it was the part of him I least feared. What I did fear, what I was now beginning to think I had not nearly sufficiently allowed for, was the enormous spiritual and mental range of the man.

Up to that moment in his life when he had become so mysteriously turned round, this very width and range had resulted in a state of balance, as the tightrope-walker is balanced by the length of his pole. But to consider either of his extremes separately was to have a cold shiver. Often I

had thought, "I'm thankful I haven't your burden of personality to bear, my friend. Much better to be the millionth man and take everything on trust. The way to be happy on this earth is to be just a shell of useful and comfortable and middling habits. Stick to the second-hand things of life and let the new ones alone. Any kind of singularity is a curse, and your life is one dreadful yawning question. You've no business to have the first dawn in your eyes and the last trump in your ears like that. The world has no need of that kind of man. What you need is another world somewhere else."

And he had marvellously contrived to find this other world, and had it all, all to himself.

And here was I proposing to dig him out of it.

Can you guess now what it was that I had begun to fear more than his physical strength? It was the whole un-gauged pressure of his personality. In behaving as foolishly as I had just behaved I had wished to spare both myself and him the humiliation of an intrusion on a vulgar amour. Now it occurred to be, Why a "vulgar" one at all? Vulgarity is for us smaller people, who are vulgar enough to think that anything that is created is vulgar. But Derwent Rose had so striven that every dawn was the first dawn of creation for him. He had no habits, had daily sought to see the world as if it had never been seen before. Abysses must open for him every time he passed a huddle on a park bench, protoplasmic re-beginnings stare out at him from every chance glance of a street-walker's eyes. . . . Oh, I am far from envying him. I should blench to have a mind like that. To no possession that I have do I cling half so dearly as I do to my narrowness and to my prejudice. I *am* the millionth man, and I thank God on my knees for it. One of the other kind has been my friend. . . .

Suppose then that one day I should surprise him in some act, stupid and meaningless to myself, but as fraught with tremendousness for him as was that first command, "Let there be Light!" What would happen then? You see what I am driving at. Up to now my idea had been, quite simply,

to find him. I had sought him much as I might have sought a truant schoolboy, who would consent to be scolded and brought back to ordinary life again. Small practical difficulties, mostly in connection with his altered appearance, I had anticipated, but these I had intended to deal with as they arose. In a word, I had assumed his willingness, his also, to be the millionth man.

But how if he should refuse with scorn? What was the state of his balance, not in my eyes, but in his? When I had last seen him he had trembled in equilibrium, and to his fluctuations I had off-handedly applied the terms "worse" and "better." But what were such terms to him? . . . I will do as I did before—try to set it out in parallel columns. Here was a missing man, a man of unusual range and powers, to whose state of poise something had happened. It was this man's daily endeavour to accept nothing at second-hand, to disregard all names, labels, customs, tags, appearances, verdicts, records, precedents. His life was one long probing into the essential nature of things. I might, therefore, expect to find:

The Derwent Rose who had said, when I had offered him the whisky, "No, no—blast it, no—water!"

or The Derwent Rose who might have replied, "Whisky? Well, it has interesting effects sometimes. Somebody once called it a short cut to a psychic experience. If a psychic experience is what you are after, why take the roundabout way? Let's try it."

The Derwent Rose who had torn off his collar, but who had also cried, "Good God, man, I'm not bragging of my conquests—don't think I'm not ashamed!"

or The Derwent Rose who might have growled, "Well, what is there extraordinary about that? Perhaps it isn't anything to make a song about, but don't pretend you've never heard of such a thing before. It happens every night, you know."

The Derwent Rose who had sat in a hansom with a white satin slipper as openly and innocently as I might have sat to Julia Oliphant for my portrait.

or The Derwent Rose who might have said, "Men are men and women are women. This is also Piccadilly Circus. Look round. Can't *you* find anything better to do than to hunt for a man who is—not at home to anybody this evening?"

The Derwent Rose who loved beauty and hated ugliness.

or The Derwent Rose who cared nothing for the name of anything, destroyed stale and outworn canons of beauty with a laugh, and sought a fresher loveliness in a world where nothing is common or unclean.

But once more I had to give it up. That baffling down of golden beard had obliterated every physical indication. He might be in a church—for an assignation. He might be in a drinking-hell—lost in images of beauty and sweetness and power.

And what kind of a *Salle des Pas Perdus* is London in which to look for a man like that? The whole thing became an illimitable phantasmagoria of virtue and vice, nobility and degradation, expressed in terms of bricks and stones and buildings and streets. Sitting brooding among his black oak furniture, I tried to envisage even that merest fragment of it all that was being enacted within a quarter of a mile at that moment. Whitfield's Tabernacle—and for all I knew an opium den within a biscuit's toss of it; the Synagogue—and the lady upstairs. I pictured the tenements behind the Shaftesbury with their iron balconies and emergency-ladders; and I saw young lovers in their stalls at the Palace. I saw the bright Hampstead buses, and the masked covertness of the flitting taxis. I heard the slap and thump of beer-pumps, children's simple prayers. Images floated before me of the gloom of cinema-interiors, the green-shaded glow-



lamps of orchestras, the rippling of incandescent advertisements, the blackness of the jam factory yard. There were pockets with money in them, money to buy all the world has to sell; and there were pockets empty of the price of a cup of coffee at the back-street barrows. There were hearts with love in them, love as boundless as heaven's blue, and there were hearts from which love had passed, hearts as musty as the graves that waited for them. All but Infinity itself was to be found within a few hundred yards of where I sat.

And flitting uniquely through it all was this man whose privacy was so public, whose publicness was so unutterably private. He might be met at any step, and yet, of all the millions living, there was not one he could call contemporary. For he was the only man in the world who was growing younger instead of older. He of all men alone was passing from experience to innocence, through the murk of his former sins to the perfection of his own maximum and the unimpaired godhead of his prime.

"But you mightn't see him again for another twenty years!" Julia protested, shaking out her napkin and laughing for the sheer bewilderment of it.

I had chosen the small restaurant in Jermyn Street because it had no band to distract us.

"I know all that," I retorted. "But if you think that just sitting there loving him is going to produce him, your way may take even longer than mine."

"Pooh!" she said, breaking her roll. "You're wasting your time."

"Don't be irritating, Julia." It irritated me because it was so true. "It's my time anyway."

"No it isn't, not all of it. What about my sittings?" (There had not yet been any, by the way.) "The canvas is ready as soon as you are."

"I'll grow a beard, and then you won't want to paint me," I replied.

Her eyes had sparkled when I had told her about Derry's

beard; I had thought she was going to clap her hands. Except for Derry's golden one (she had said) she had never seen a beard that wasn't nasty. I myself (she had informed me) should look a perfect horror in one, and unless I remained clean-shaven she refused to be seen about with me. . . . So our customary quarrel blew up. We wrangled about one trifle and another half-way through dinner. It probably did us good, for underneath we were both badly on edge. Then along the edge of the table she slid a bent little finger. It was her way of making up. The finger rested in mine for a moment.

"Well," I sighed, "I told you all I saw. I'm afraid that beard threw me quite out of my reckoning."

She mused. "I once drew him with his beard, from memory. In armour. He looked just like King Arthur come to life again. I've got it yet. . . . But let's look at the thing reasonably, George. I admit there's something to be said for having a *pied-à-terre* in his rooms. He might just possibly turn up there. It might also be—hm!—awkward if he did. . . . But the rest, all this hunting for him, that's a wash-out. You know it is."

I was silent. Then again I saw in her eyes what I had seen before—the beginning of a soft deep shining, as if some diver's lamp moved beneath the waters at night.

"No, I prefer my way," she said, suddenly sitting straight up.

"Doing nothing at all?"

"Fiddlesticks! *I'm* supposed to sit and listen respectfully when *you* talk, but *you* never listen to what *I've* got to say. I told you what my way was. I'll tell you again. I had tea at Daphne Bassett's flat this afternoon."

"I hope you found Puppetty well," I remarked.

The kindling eyes were steadily on mine.

"Puppetty," she said slowly, "is in the greatest favour. Puppetty has wing-portions for dinner and bovril to go to bed with. Puppetty's to have a new quilt for being a good little doggles and protecting his mummie——"

"What on earth——" I began.

Then I sat up as suddenly as if I had been galvanised.

"Julia! You don't mean——?"

She nodded, darkling devils of mischief under that cool smooth brow.

"What, that *he's* still looking for *her*?"

"He's found her. He spoke to her a couple of days ago."

"And she recognised him?"

"I didn't say that."

"Didn't she recognise him?"

"Didn't know him from Adam."

"Then how do you know it was he?"

I cannot convey the lightness of her disdain. "How do I know!——"

I leaned back in my chair. To think that I had not thought of this, the oldest of all stratagems! *Guettez la femme!* Runaways are caught by it every day, and always will be. They are released from custody and placed under observation so that they may walk straight into the trap. That is why the trick is old—it never fails. And I had not thought of it!

She wore her triumph with such present moderation that I knew I had not heard the last of it.

"Yes," she continued, "she told me all about it. It was on Monday evening, about seven o'clock, and she was coming up the little street by St. James's Church, where the Post Office is. She fancied she'd noticed a man following her, a very big handsome man with a golden beard."

"Is that her description of him?" I interrupted.

"Yes. That's why I wasn't much surprised when you told me about his beard. Then outside the Post Office the outrage happened. He spoke to her. Spoke to her, George. Try to realise it."

"Well, if she'd no idea who he was it wasn't a pleasant thing to have happen."

She gave a soft laugh. "He's very good-looking," she said brazenly.

"Julia, if you were naturally a catty sort of woman——"

"Don't interrupt, George. I am artificially then. If you

don't want to hear go out and look for hansoms. And whatever else you're sententious about don't be sententious about women. Now I've forgotten what I was going to say."

"You said he spoke to her outside the Post Office."

"Behave yourself then. He did speak to her, and she set Puppetty at him."

"*What!*" I cried.

"Quite so, dear George. *As* you say. Fearfully pleased and excited really. Quite a romance. And of course she'd have given anything *not* to set Puppetty at him."

"Then why in the name of goodness did she?"

Julia gave an exhausted sigh. "If ever you marry, George, heaven help Lady Coverham! . . . Why did she? Because she had to. She's that sort. They've got to do certain things because that sort does, but they *do* so wish they needn't! Virtue's a funny thing. If you don't want that ice may I have it?"

"But look here," I said presently. "If he'd said straight out, as any man in his position would have done, 'I say, I know this is a bit unusual, but my name's Derwent Rose, and there's something I want to explain'—and so on—you see what I mean. Then she'd have known who he was."

"Well, I'm afraid I'm not responsible for what he didn't say."

"What exactly did he say?"

She gave a shrug. "What do men say? They don't stop *me* outside post offices. You never did; if all this hadn't happened I don't suppose I should ever have known you one scrap better. I dare say he was a bit rattled too. Anyway she didn't stop to think. She just set the dog at him, legged it, and she's as pleased as Punch still."

"You're quite sure she didn't recognise him?"

"Oh, quite. She'd tell me in a minute. She'd love to be able to say she'd had Derwent Rose at her feet."

"I suppose so," I sighed. "Did you ask her what aged man this—marauder—looked?"

"What do you think? Of course I did. Doesn't everything turn on that? But she could only tell me, 'Oh, about

thirty-three or four—thirty-five perhaps.’ The very thing we want to know . . . but she was in such a hurry to be virtuous. . . .”

Her brow was no longer smooth. Her voice rose a little and then dropped again.

“You see how much turns on which it is—thirty-five or thirty-three. You say he was struggling with himself that night, sweating with funk, wanting to hang on. And yet the moment you turned your back he bolted, and he’s riding about with ladies in hansoms.”

“Come, my dear!” I protested. “There’s nothing in that! All men drive about with women. For that matter I drove you part of the way here.”

But she cut me impatiently short.

“Oh, I don’t mean that at all! That’s nothing to me! I don’t care who he takes in hansoms; I’ve nothing to gain and nothing to lose. I want him to have just whatever he wants. But I told you he knew nothing about women. He’s never been in love in his life. Oh, I’m explaining badly, but what I mean is that if you’re going to find him by going through London with a dustman’s besom and scraper, that’s as much as to say that he isn’t happy. That’s what hurts me. He was miserable at thirty-five before—miserable and ashamed. *But the moment he’s thirty-three again—*”

I watched the long white fingers that tapped softly for a minute on the table before she resumed.

“*Then* he’s all right,” she said in a low and moved voice. “He was writing the *Vicarage* then. I saw—oh, quite lots of him. He used to ‘blow in,’ as he called it, with a ‘Hallo, Julia! I’m having rather a devil of a good time these days; writing a book that will make some of ’em sit up and take notice; I’ve done a quarter of it in three weeks; how’s that for a little gentle occupation?’ Yes, I saw quite a lot of him at thirty-three. I had a studio near Cremorne Road. It wasn’t really a studio, but a sort of gutted top floor, big enough to have given a dance in, and my bed was behind a curtain that was drawn right across one end. I used to give him tea there—Patum Paperium sandwiches he liked—and

he was sweet. Once I'd an illustration to do for some stupid story or other, about a sort of Sandow-and-Hackenschmidt all rolled into one, and do you know what he did? He looked at my drawing, took it to the window, and then laughed. 'I say, Julia, this will never do!' he said. 'When a man lifts a heavy thing like that he does it *from the earth*, you understand—you do everything that's worth doing from the earth. So you've got to see his feet are right. Anybody likely to come in here? No? Right; I don't mind you. Got anything heavy here? You get your paper and pencil.' And he stripped to the belt and picked up my sewing-machine and posed for me. He did. . . ."

## V

I seemed to see the scene in bright illumination, him in that upper room with the curtains drawn across one end, his jacket and shirt tossed on to a chair, his great torso stripped to the buff, the sewing-machine held aloft. She would be at her board or easel, sketching—pretending to sketch—I don't know what. He had merely said, "Anybody likely to come in? No? Right! I don't mind you!"

It was true. He hadn't minded her. Otherwise he would never have displayed himself so gloriously before her eyes.

"Did that illustration ever appear?" I asked without looking at her.

I knew without looking that she smiled as she shook her head.

"Not that one. You know it didn't. The first one was good enough for them."

And she still had the King Arthur sketch too.

"And that was when he was thirty-three?"

Now that she was off there was no stopping her, even had I wished it.

"Yes. Did you know—will you believe—that he wrote his *Vicarage* in just over three months?"

"He was a furious worker."

"That's just where you're wrong, George," she said eagerly. "At that time at any rate. He was as cool as this ice. He just digested those gigantic masses of information, and then, except for the trouble of writing it down, he never turned a hair. I'll tell you the things that did make him furious; those were his rottenest short stories, the things he used to have to do to pay his rent. He always knew they were the wrong sort of rottenness. Any kind of rottenness won't do for the public. You've got to be rotten in quite a specialised way."

"Thank you."

"But the bigger a thing was the easier he always found it. He used to say that if a thing was hard work there was something wrong somewhere. Why, he'd take whole days off when he was at his very busiest. He came into my place one morning—the same place, Cremorne Road—before half-past eight. I was just finishing breakfast; I hadn't done my hair; if you must know, I was rather a sloven at that time. He was in his breeches and cap and a soft collar. 'Down tools, Julia,' he said; 'we're off into the country for the day.' 'But, Derry, your book!' I said, rather aghast (he'd told me a day or two before that the *Vicarage* was a race against time or else bankruptcy for him in the autumn). 'Oh, that's all right; it's finished as far as I'm concerned; the pen 'll do the rest; come along just as you are.' So I put my hair up, and we went to Chalfont, and got horribly midge-bitten, and there was an old man playing the harp outside a little public-house where we had tea, and I remember Derry jumped over a five-barred gate with his stick in his hand and his pipe in his mouth. . . ."

She remembered every detail. I don't think she had ever once seen him but she remembered what he had on, how he had looked, what he had talked about. These were the still depths I spoke of, of which the rest was no more than the salt spray surface. I might be hanging about Cambridge Circus on the off-chance of his coming for a paper or a book

or something; but I believe that in her heart something was already rekindling, and that she was even then waiting to receive him again in that upper room off Cremorne Road.

"Well," she said at last, "this is all very well, but it isn't getting us much farrarder. Of course he may be thirty-five still. In that case I suppose you'll carry on as you are doing. But let's suppose for a moment he's back at thirty-three. I'm afraid that'll mean a good deal of work for you, George. You've got to start on an entirely new set of places. Let me see, what year would that be? Yes, 1908. Where was he mostly in 1908?"

"In your studio apparently."

"Oh, he was never there very much really. I dare say he only came at all because it was near and he'd drawn a blank somewhere else; he lived in Paulton's Square, you know. No, you'd have to look for him in the British Museum Reading Room, or the lobby of the House of Commons, or wherever the Blue Books are kept, or some other place where he'd be digging out all that terrible *Vicarage* stuff. Or if it happened to be a Thursday night you might try the Eyre Arms; he used to go up there to the Belsize Boxing Club. Cheer up, George. I'm only showing you what you've let yourself in for."

"Well, it's no good looking for him in the fourth dimension. He's got to be in some sort of a place. And I admit that I was a fool, and that you found him simply by sitting in Mrs Bassett's pocket."

"I didn't do that at all," she remarked composedly.

"Then I'm afraid I haven't understood you."

"Then let me tell you. I didn't sit in Daphne Bassett's pocket. I sat in Daphne Wade's."

I stared at her. Was she suggesting that while she herself had loved him since childhood, he for his part had loved Daphne Wade?

"Surely you're wrong there. If there was ever anything between her and him I'm no judge of men."

"There may not have 'been anything.' But there was everything for all that," she replied.



"That's merely enigmatic. Never mind 'everything.' Tell me what thing."

"All his dreams and ideals when he was a boy," she answered promptly. "Isn't that everything in a man like him—the everything he's on his way back to?"

"But he never loved her in the least, nor she him, as far as I'm aware."

"That I shall *never* forgive her. . . . Don't you know yet why he never knew anything about real women? It was simply because he was too wrapped up in his dreams. He was so full of them that he couldn't see anything truly for them. And now I'm afraid I'm going to dispel one of your most cherished illusions, George. Do you know why his dreams all settled on Daphne Wade? Oh, it had nothing to do with loving her! . . . It was simply because she had that coloured hair. It *was* rather like an aureole when she was a child. And her eyes *were* blue. In fact she'd all the conventional angelic appliances except the wings, and he supplied those. She'd nothing whatever else—little fool."

I frowned. Certainly she was entitled to speak of those early days towards which his face was once more set, since she had known him then, and I had not.

"Have some more coffee," I said. "I want to think this over."

But she only laughed softly.

"Oh, you needn't. You'll save yourself a lot of trouble by simply taking my word for it. In any case it's getting on for thirty years ago. Oh, don't I just remember! . . . I was nine and he was fourteen; I was ten and he was fifteen; I was eleven and he was sixteen. She's just a year older than I am. Our pew was half-way down the church, but she sat up one of the aisles, right under a stained-glass window there was. It used to make that light on her hair. My hair was the wrong colour—I knew it then—just a dark mop—but anyway it was full of life. It would still have been dark, of course, even if I'd sat under the window instead of her, but I've sometimes thought it might have made a difference. Then there was all the rest; Dicksee's 'Har-

mony' sort of effect; all so cool and dim and saintly; and the organ and the Psalms. *That's* what filled his head, and I honestly believe that unless women are just animals to him he sees them like that still—just about as much flesh and blood as that window was. All she had to do was to have that hair and those eyes and to sit in the vicarage pew. Things are made very simple for some women."

A long silence fell between us. Evidently she was back in that church, an adoring wrong-coloured-haired girl of eleven, shifting in her seat to see, past intervening bonnets and bald heads, Derry's brown-gold crown, while he watched Daffy Wade and the window.

"But," I said at last, "aren't you rather anticipating? I thought we'd settled he was thirty-five or thirty-three. That's making him sixteen already."

She rose abruptly.

"George, do you realise that we're the last people here and that they've turned half the lights out?" Then, drawing forward her furs from the back of her chair, "It isn't making him anything of the sort. You're more than thirty-five; but you sometimes *remember* what you were at sixteen, don't you? . . . Come and put me into my Tube and off you go to bed. Who knows?—he might 'blow in' to Cambridge Circus——"

*"You sometimes remember what you were at sixteen!"*

I wondered, as I walked slowly up Shaftesbury Avenue that night, whether she realised what she had said. I hoped not. I prayed not; because her words seemed to me to murder her own cherished hope—that he was safely past that turbulent phase and back at thirty-three again.

For that poignancy of remembrance, I am glad to think, is more frequently a man's than a woman's. It is the man who, slipping away, away from his youth and innocence, down, down, slip after slip into the mire of life, lifts his red and weeping eyes to what he used to be. And when does that vision shine most agonisingly fair? Not in the hours of his philosophy, when nothing unduly elates him and

nothing too much casts him down, but when he is in the slough as deep as he can get. Oh, I know it, for I have sinned myself, have myself wept, for that impossible heart-break—to be as I once was. And if Julia was right, and he was not seeking Mrs Bassett at all, nor even Daphne Wade, but merely his remembered self at sixteen, then he was *not* thirty-three at all. He had *not* yet passed beyond that phase he had dreaded to re-live. He was still in the mud, to have had that tear-blurred vision; still a sinful man of thirty-five who remembered the morning star.

Well, Julia must not know that. This dark corollary was for my shouldering, not hers. And as I resolved to keep it from her I wondered at the marvel her own inner life had been.

For nearly thirty years it had consisted of Derwent Rose and of nothing whatever else! None would have guessed it, none but I knew it, nothing but Derry's unprecedented adventure would have dragged it from her. She was a busy painter, of but moderate talent, and with her living to earn. She could purr when she was pleased, but had claws ready to scratch with as well. And, deep and unguessed behind it all, lay the story of those Sussex fields and lanes, of that dreaming and ecstatic and unheeding boy, of that same boy, grown-up and still unheeding, who had stalked in and out of her studio, borne her off to Chalfont, held aloft her sewing-machine. It seemed to me that her case was little less extraordinary than his. I saw her as a woman who had never grown. She was as she had always been, her life stultified with beauty, a poised and arrested development of love.

And, unless I was mistaken, she had hardly sought to conceal her joy that, as it had been, so it was to be again.

For he was journeying back to a place that in this sense she had never left; and so he was journeying back to her. What though he had never loved her? At any rate she was now rid of her last living rival. That had been put to the test when Daphne Bassett had failed to recognise the man who had spoken to her outside the Post Office in St. James's.

She would recognise him less and less as time went on. As for him, he would merely go deeper and deeper into the heart of his inconceivable solitude, and there, in the last and the centre of it, he would find Julia Oliphant waiting for him—waiting for her always loved and lordly boy of sixteen.

But how much must happen before then! For the first time I envisaged it in its heartbreaking beauty. Lovely, apparently inevitable the close . . . but the way there? What, steeling her heart, must she see before that meeting?

She must see a man whose last kiss was his first one, who un-lived a thousand adventures to become virgin in the end. She must see a man living so unutterably long that he lived to write his first poem again. She would see a man who had fought through a war of flame and poison puckering his smooth brows over his first percussion-cap pistol. She would see the dust of his athletic laurels stir, reassemble, bloom anew. She would see the miracle of youth synthesised, the grail of his purity mystically reappear. Not even Joshua saw what those liquid and already tired brown eyes of hers must see—the sun of a man's life pause at noon, swing contrary to its orbit, and move back to set where it rose.

And all at once there came over me a whelming of passionate emotion for this woman so singled out. It was the emotion one feels over an infant whose eyes open for the first time on the world—compassion and ache and hapless tenderness and hope for the best. Would she be able to bear her destiny? Would she, had such a thing been possible, have elected never to have been born rather than bear it? Could I help her? If things should unfold as they were well in motion to unfold, could any power on earth help her?

I began to suspect that, unless she renounced him once for all, and that quickly, no power on earth would be able to help her.

I don't know why I did not pack up my things and go back to Haslemere. I no longer pretended to be looking for

Derwent Rose in London, and I had not given one single sitting for my portrait. Yet, though I could not help Julia, I felt myself unable to leave her. If I did not see her for an evening I was disturbed, lost what to do with myself. Several of these evenings came, and still I lingered on.

Then, I think on the fourth evening after I had given Julia dinner in Jermyn Street, the history of Derwent Rose moved forward—or backward—once more.

I had thought of looking up Madge Aird that evening, but at the last moment had changed my mind. I did not feel up to Madge's liveliness. So I hung round that now so-drearily-familiar neighbourhood instead—the neighbourhood between Leicester Square Tube Station and Tottenham Court Road. I walked till I was tired, and then, more for the sake of sitting down than for any other reason, I entered a picture-house on the west side of Shaftesbury Avenue. I did not choose that one in particular. It was just like any other picture-house except that it had a small organ built into the wall high up in one corner. This organ was ceasing to play as I entered. The principal drama of the programme was just over.

As it chanced, I had arrived just in time for one of those rather curious effects that are obtained when the film is put through the machine extremely slowly. You know the kind I mean. A racehorse in full career picks up and puts down his legs as if they were fronds of seaweed moving lazily in water; a golf-ball trickles uncannily across the green, rising and falling idly over each minute obstacle, and then floats gently down into the hole. In spite of my languor I found myself interested in these analyses of motion. It is curious to see instantaneousness taking its time over a thing like that.

Then that series also finished, and I felt in my pocket for my cigarette case. As I drew out a cigarette and struck a match somebody behind me leaned forward and touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"I say, isn't your name Coverham?" a man's voice said.

The match was still in my fingers. I looked over my shoulder in the light of it. Then I dropped the match.

I had not found him. He had found me. It was Derwent Rose.

PART III  
THE STRAPHANGER





## I

He was not far from the end of the row, and in reaching him I had not to disturb more than three or four people. Though it is inadequate, I have decided that the single word that best expresses the way in which he spoke is the word "careful." He spoke slowly, and, it seemed to me, with extreme care.

"Interesting idea that last, isn't it? Restful. Things go at such a deuce of a rate nowadays that it's a comfort to see anything slow. Well, how are you, George? I haven't seen you for—some little time."

It was precisely three weeks since he had last seen me, and I noted that slight, that very slight hesitation before his last words.

"Do you often come here? I—I rather keep away from these places myself; they put everything through much too quickly; but I rather like this one because of the organ. Of course they only play 'effects'—'Ora Pro Nobis' and the 'Wedding March'—but there's something about an organ. . . . I say, George," he said a little uncomfortably, "I've a sort of feeling I owe you an apology."

"Well, this is hardly the place for it. We can't talk here. If you've seen all you want suppose we go outside?"

The thing I wanted first of all was to have a good look at him. Already I could see that he no longer had a beard. But my surreptitious glance at him as we passed out into the lighted vestibule and past the box-office told me little. On the pavement of Shaftesbury Avenue he slipped his arm into mine.

"Yes, I fancy I talked an awful lot of rubbish that night—bit of an ass of myself—you remember——"

I did not reply. The important thing was, not whether I

remembered, but whether his memory was all that it should have been, for he was forgetting something even as he spoke. He remembered that other night, he had remembered my name; but if he remembered that he had rooms and belongings in Cambridge Circus he was very deliberately turning down Shaftesbury Avenue instead of up it. But I went where he led me. I was resolved, however, that the moment his arm left mine, mine should go into his. I was not going to let him disappear again.

The typical Soho mixture thronged the pavements: Hebrew physiognomies, Italian, Greek; dark chins, bold eyes, bold noses; rings and scarfpins, fancy socks, the double-heeled silk stockings of women. As I could not very well scrutinise his face at that short range I did the next best thing; I watched the faces that advanced towards us. As if he had been a pretty woman, so heads turned as he passed. They turned as they turn for Billy Wells. It was not so much his size and proportions as his whole personal aura. He stood out among all that flashy cosmopolitanism as if a special and inherent light attended him.

"Which way are we going? Where do you live?" I suddenly asked him. It was not the question I was burning to ask him. That question was, "*When* do you live?" I felt the slight movement of the muscles under his sleeve, but he answered steadily enough—carefully enough.

"Oh, I've been rather lucky about that," he said. "I happened to be in the wine-bar of an hotel in Gloucester Road one night, and I got talking to a fellow. I fancied I'd come across him somewhere in France—as a matter of fact I had, though he didn't remember me. Anyway, we'd started talking, and we went on. Rather an amusing crowd there, George. If I were asked to put in one word the basic domestic factor of their lives, do you know what it would be? A pint of methylated spirits. They don't pay half a crown for it at the chemist's; they pay one-and-twopence at the oilshop. To boil their kettles, of course. They all fought, they're all gentlemen, and they're all doing damn-all to make a living. So they take garrets and rooms over garages, and

cook their breakfasts with methylated spirits. This fellow was called Trenchard. Got all messed up at the Brick Stacks, La Bassée way. He had to go out of town for a month, and said I could have his place for the bare rent, twenty-five bob a week, and the use of his furniture for nothing. So that's where I am. This way——”

We turned into Leicester Square Tube Station.

In the train I sat opposite to him; and, now that he had taken his beard off, I couldn't see that he had changed very remarkably in outward appearance after all. Nevertheless I distrusted my own impression. I knew that I was full of pre-conceptions about him, knew too much of his astonishing case to observe impartially and reliably. There are some things—some scents for example—that you have to make up your mind immediately about or else to remain in indecision. The longer you delay the less sure you become. So I found it with his face in the electric-lighted Tube. It was, of course, astoundingly young for a man in the middle forties; but call him thirty-five and much of the wonder disappeared. The most that a casual acquaintance would have been likely to remark was, “How the deuce does Rose manage to keep so extraordinarily young-looking?” True, his friend Trenchard had failed to recognise the man with whom he had fought at La Bassée, but that meant little. There were millions of men in France, each the spit of the rest for mud and momentariness of acquaintance. To-day, by mere association of times and places and battles, these men are in fact resuming acquaintances they have no recollection of ever having begun. “Oh, I've a rotten memory for faces—seen So-and-so lately? And I say, do you know anybody who wants to take a quiet place for a month?” That, no doubt, had been the substance of that conversation in the Gloucester Road wine-bar. . . . And there was another thing of which I shall have more to say by and by. I began to suspect that whatever strange element in Derwent Rose had brought him to this pass, that element reacted on those of us who knew his secret. He probably became less extraordinary in our eyes as contemplation of him made us

not quite ordinary ourselves. Julia Oliphant (it seemed to me) he had already influenced, constrained, isolated. We were getting used to him. But I shall return to this.

In the meantime I was considerably cheered. He remembered that other night; he wanted to apologise for the lunacy of it; he had given a perfectly coherent account of his present whereabouts and how he came to be there, and his summing-up of the fellows whose basic domestic factor was a pint of methylated spirits had given me a clear and straightforward picture. As for the rest—why he had left Cambridge Circus, what it was that he found restful in those slowed-down films, and especially the measured carefulness of his speech—for the present these things could wait.

We left Gloucester Road Station, turned up towards Princes Gate, and then crossed the road and entered a dark gardened Square. Three minutes further walking brought us to a high stone archway with a heavily carved and moulded entablature, beneath which a cobbled way sloped slightly down into a mews. To right and left were garages, some closed, others open and flinging shafts of orange light across the way. Somewhere an engine was being allowed to "race"; somewhere else a hose was being turned on to the body of a car. High over the roofs of the mews, as if suspended at random in the sky, the oblongs of light of the South Kensington backs showed. One unshaded incandescent burned on a top landing like a star.

"Let me go first; I've got a torch," said Derry, stopping at a narrow side-door next to where the car was being washed. "You'll find the rope on the right."

The moon of his electric torch shone on the broad treads of a steep-pitched ladder that rose to a loft above. Up one side of it ran a hand-rope. He preceded me, and on the upper landing lighted a wire-caged gas-jet. Then I followed him into Trenchard's abode.

He had described the place admirably well when he had spoken of the methylated spirits, adding that Trenchard was a gentleman. A few pieces of furniture—notably a tall walnut hanging-cupboard and a handsome lacquered cabi-

net—were evidently family possessions; the rest—his cretonne curtains, floor-mats, the blue-and-white check tablecloth on the thick-legged Victorian table and the glimpse into his kitchen—probably represented the greater part of his gratuity-money. Every ledge and angle and cheap bracket was crowded with photographs, and there were trees in his long row of boots. His central incandescent mantle was unshaded. Two deep basket chairs stood one on either side of where the hearth should have been. The portable oil-burning stove was tucked away in a corner.

“You soon get used to the noises,” said Rose with a downward nod of his head. “I scarcely hear ’em now.—Lemonade? It’s bottled, but not bad; tastes of lemons anyway. There’s a siphon behind you there.”

He put me into one of the basket chairs and himself took the other. Then, without the least warning, but still with that marked effort at steadiness and care, he said:

“Well, what price the world-political state, George? Not home-politics, but the whole thing—democracy—civilisation if you like——”

If he had asked me what I thought of the theory of relativity I should have been readier with an answer. As it was I looked askance at him and asked him what made him so suddenly ask me that.

“Oh, same old reason,” he replied. “I expect it’s a subject I shall have to tackle. In a book. I wonder if it’s too big! It pulls me enormously. I don’t know whether we’re in for a general smash-up or not. Sometimes I’ve the feeling we are.”

Something within me, I don’t know what, warned me that here it might be well to be as careful as he. The safest thing to do appeared to be to let him run on, and I did so.

“Yes,” he continued, his fine smooth brow gathered in thought, “I know it’s enormous; perhaps too staggering altogether for one man. But do you know,” he laughed a little as if at himself, “I wonder whether it *is* so enormous after all! There might be quite a simple idea underlying it, I mean. What’s more enormous than human nature? Yet

every wretched little novelist tackles that every time he writes a book. It all depends on how much you see in a thing. I'm not so sure that I wouldn't as soon tackle one day of the whole world's life as one single hour of a human being's heart."

I spoke warily. "You haven't tackled it yet?"

He hesitated. "N—o," he said slowly. Then, quickening a little, "The fact is, George, a job like that would have to be rather specially approached. I mean unless you were at the very top of your form you'd be bound to come a cropper. No good starting a thing till you know your tools are sharp—in this case your faculties. I'm—I'm sharpening myself now, if you know what I mean."

At this point I became incautious. I ceased to listen to the voice that warned me too to be careful.

"Well, that's what I want to ask you," I said. "I want to know what you're doing here and why you left Cambridge Circus like that."

I was instantly sorry I had said it. Just as wrestlers on a mat lie locked, with little apparent movement, yet in the fiercest intensity of prolonged strain, so I felt that something struggled in him. I heard it in his voice, I saw it in the boyish grey-blue eyes that sought mine.

"Don't, please, old fellow," he pleaded anxiously. "If you mean the rot I talked that other night, I apologise now once for all. I've been hoping for months and months—for a long time, I mean, that I might run across you. You're so magnificently steady. That other place stopped being steady. . . . This is the place to write that book. I want to write it. I've never wanted anything so much. It would be on *Vicarage* lines, I suppose, but oh—immensely bigger! Freedom, scope! The *Vicarage* was well enough in its way, but fussy and niggly and scratchy. I can do this largely, grandly—I *know* so much more, you see—and as long as I don't take any risks—"

Then, in spite of his own last words, he swung suddenly round, and the youthful grey-blue eyes were all a-sparkle. They sparkled with daring, as if, though a risk was a risk,

there was sometimes prudence in taking it. The wicker of his chair began to creak under the working of his hand.

"One little talk can't make much difference," he muttered. "Do me good probably—magnificently steady——" Then he flashed brightly round on me—an artist at the height of his power confronting a stupendous and magnificent task.

"You see, don't you, George? You see how I'm placed, don't you?" he demanded.

"Not very clearly."

"Then I'll tell you. I *want* to write this book. I want to write it as Cheops made his Pyramid, as Moses made his Decalogue—to last for ever. If I can't write it no living man can. Why? Because no living man combines in himself what I combine—the ripest and fullest store of knowledge and experience and all the irresistible recklessness and belief of youth at the same time. Here I stand, between the two, and if I can only stay so I shall write—I shall write—oh, such a book as never was dreamed of! So I've got to stand still just where I am now. I haven't got to budge from thirty-three—that, as nearly as I can tell from myself, is the age I am now. You see——"

Uneasily I began to wish myself elsewhere. I knew that I began to be afraid in his presence; it is an eerie thing to hear a man deliberately proposing to manipulate his age. The man down below continued to wash the car; I heard the clank of his bucket, the rushing of his hose.

"Thirty-three," he continued, his eyes still glittering with the excitement of it. "If I can only stay so for six months nothing matters after that! God, just for six months! . . . But it's not so easy as it sounds, George. You've got to be on the watch every moment. As long as you're moving the thing's simple enough; it's when you try to stop that it's like trying to stand still on a bicycle. Wait, I'll show you. Push that table over. And if you don't mind I'll turn down the gas."

It was not the heavy-legged Victorian table he wanted me to push over, but the one on which our glasses of lemonade stood, a flimsy affair of bamboo and wicker, hardly more

than eighteen inches square. He rose, turned the yellow incandescent down to a glimmer, drew the table up before us, and brought the electric torch from his pocket. He began to speak with very much more volubility, very much less care.

"The line of that table-edge is what I want you to keep your mind on," he began. "Never mind any other dimension. You'll get the idea presently. I want you to imagine that edge a scale of years, with the higher numbers at your end and the lower ones at mine. You're to imagine that, and then you're to imagine that this lamp's my mind, me, my faculties, whatever you like to call it. You'll get on to it presently. Now watch."

The torch was not of the stick-pattern, but of the flask type with a wider angle. In the middle of the table's edge he made a minute notch with his nail. A foot or so of the split-bamboo edge was illuminated, with this notch in the middle of it.

"Now," he said. "You see that notch I've made. That's my present age—thirty-three—dead in the middle of the lighted portion. Now let's start. First of all I've got two memories. I've got one in each direction. I'm the only man who has. And this part of the edge that the torch lights up is my total range both ways. Now watch me move the torch. If I move it your way"—he did so—"I get more of memory 'A' ('A' for Age) and less of memory 'B' ('B' for Boyhood). And if I move it my way"—he moved it his way—"I get less of 'A' and more of 'B.' See?"

I saw. I began to wish I didn't.

"Very well," he went on. "Obviously it's for me to decide where I want to stop, and then—to do so if I can. And now the bother begins. If—that—scale—could be numbered properly"—he divided the words as I have divided them, and I felt cold at the intensity of his emphasis—"if it could be divided as I want it divided, with thirty-three dead in the middle—then forty-five would come *here*." He crossed his left hand over the one that held the torch, as a pianist picks out a single treble note, and dug another nick at my end of



the illuminated portion. "Now," he continued, "let's see what the figure would be at my end. Forty-five less thirty-three is twelve, and twelve from thirty-three's twenty-one. It would be twenty-one." He registered another notch, this time at his own end. "But"—swiftly he slid the torch his way—"twenty-one's no good to me at all. No more good than a sick headache. I've got to be younger than that. You see what I've got to do. I've got to combine the two maximum phases of myself if I'm to write that book. But at the same time I've got to write it when I *did* write that kind of thing before. What does that mean? Where's a bit of paper?"

He set the torch down on the table, where it made a vivid flat parabola of light, and took an envelope from his pocket. In the semi-darkness he began to jot down figures.

"Here you are. Just a few specimen numbers for trial and error. I'm assuming that the scale's capable of regular division, which it isn't, for many reasons; but let's take it in its simplest form.

16:33:50—21:33:45—30:33:36

We needn't bother about the last one; I only put it in to show that thirty-three's got to come in the middle by hook or by crook. Now do you see what I'm up against? I *must* have sixteen at one end, I *must* have forty-five at the other, and I *must* if possible have thirty-three in the middle, because if I don't write this as I wrote *The Vicarage of Bray*, only infinitely more so, I shan't write it at all. But thirty-three's a false middle. Thirty's the true middle, and thirty's perfectly useless to me. I was doing quite other things when I was thirty before. . . . But as matters stand, if I'm thirty-three I can only remember forty-five and twenty-one. If I'm thirty-three and remember sixteen, which is what I'm after, then . . . God knows what would happen at your end; I should have to remember fifty, I suppose, and I've never been fifty to remember. So something's wrong, and I'm trying to fake it."

"Derry!" I choked. "For the love of God turn up that light!"

"Eh? Certainly. Then I can show you my diagrams. This is all elementary stuff, but I thought it would give you a faint idea of the problem. Now the most important factor of all——"

But I didn't want to see the hideous thing in diagram form. It even added to my horror that he didn't seem to see it as hideous at all. He was perplexed, impatient, angry even, but for the rest he had approached his problem as methodically and dispassionately as if he had merely been taking the reading of his gas-meter. Just so in the past he had approached that sufficiently-enormous work, *The Vicarage of Bray*—and in the intervals had taken Julia Oliphant to Chalfont, jumped five-barred gates, and had posed for her, stripped to the waist with her sewing-machine held above his head.

He had turned up the gas again, and was hunting in a corner—for his diagrams, I supposed. Suddenly I rose, crossed over to him, and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Leave it alone, old man," I said in a shocked voice. "I don't want to see them. I won't look at them. I'm too afraid. Give that book up now. We aren't meant to write books of that kind. Give it up, clear out of here, and let's go away together somewhere."

I don't think I altered his resolution in the least. He merely patted my shoulder, humouring me.

"Oh, we'll start it anyway, George. Once I get fairly going I don't mind taking a day or two or a week off with you. I always enjoyed stealing a few days when I was busiest. No, the thing's got hold of me, and it will have to run its course, like measles. I may possibly be able to split the difference between thirty and thirty-three. I'm doing my very utmost."

"How?"

It seemed to me that he became evasive. "Oh—just little dodges——"

"Like watching slowed-down pictures?"

He became still more evasive. "If I hadn't spoken to you to-night you'd never have seen me, you know," he reproached me.

"I've been looking for you though. And I did see you once."

"Where was that?" he asked quickly.

"In a hansom, in Piccadilly Circus."

He winced. "Don't, George," he begged me.

"And you weren't alone."

"George—I say, George—you see how I'm trying to keep steady. Must you throw me all over the shop again like this?"

But somehow I was no longer afraid of him. It seemed to me that it might be no ill thing to anger him. Anger was at least a more human feeling than those hideous speculations of his.

"What have you been doing since you left Cambridge Circus?" I demanded.

My plan looked like working. He confronted me.

"And what's that got to do with you?" he said.

"I think I could tell you what you've been doing. Naturally I shan't."

He looked coldly down on me. "No," he said slowly, "I don't think I would if I were you. . . . And if you've seen me, I've seen you too," he added menacingly.

"Before to-night?"

"Yes, before to-night."

"Where was that?"

There was contempt in his tone. "Oh, nowhere discreditable. You're too magnificently steady for that."

I cannot tell you why we were standing together in one corner of the room, body to body, with all the rest of the room empty. I only know that I was not afraid of him, and that my intention to provoke him was now fixed. Quite apart from those inhuman figures and graphs, this book that he was contemplating approached—I will risk saying it—the impious.

"Well, where was it?" I asked again.

His eyes were unwinkingly on mine. "You were coming out of my place, if you must know. And I imagine my place is still mine. Since we're friends, I haven't asked you what you were doing there."

"Then I'll tell you without asking. I've been staying there, on the chance of your coming back for something you'd forgotten. I've got your key in my pocket now, and I'm going back there to-night."

He muttered, his eyes now removed from mine. "Damned good guess. I did come back. But I saw you across the road and turned away again."

"What did you come back for?"

"That Gland book. But I got a copy somewhere else."

"I hope you found it useful."

Then, all in a moment, the thing for which I was longing happened. He broke down completely. Instead of a man trying to maintain an insane tight-rope-balance on an indeterminable moment of time, there pitched against me, crushing me against the wall and bringing down a shower of Trenchard's photographs, a man who could be met on common ground of normal experience. His arms were folded over his face. I heard his groan within them.

"Lord have mercy upon me! . . . I oughtn't to have talked—I oughtn't to have talked . . . all unsettled again . . . but I *can't* let sixteen go . . . perhaps it won't let me go. . . ."

"For heaven's sake forget that nightmare!"

But he mumbled despairingly on. "Shall have to be thirty . . . no way out of it . . . why did I let myself talk! . . . Give us a hand, there's a good fellow——"

I got him into his chair again. I soothed him. I talked to him as if he had been a child. I told him he should be whatever age he wished, should write any kind of book he pleased, should come abroad with me. Then for a minute or so he seemed to go to sleep. I watched him. The sounds of car-washing had ceased, up the yard somebody whistled, and I heard a voice call "Good night." Past Trenchard's cretonne curtains that star of an incandescent on the upper

landing went suddenly out. It must have been half-past eleven. A more peaceful beauty stole over and possessed his face.

But he was not asleep. He opened his eyes. He smiled faintly at me.

"Well, George——" he said with a heavy sigh.

Then he told me the history of his past three weeks.

## II

Of his past three weeks or his past two or three years, whichever you like; for it was both. And now that he was in comparative peace I wished to spare him questions. That illustration with the flash-lamp on the table's edge had scared me half out of my wits; and if the determination of "ratios" or what not meant much of that kind of thing, for the present we were as well without them.

He had gone back to the point where, returning that afternoon to Cambridge Circus to fetch a book, he had seen me coming out of his house and had turned tail again.

"The Gland book, you said?" I asked. "But I thought you'd decided that that road led nowhere."

"So I had," he replied, "but in the meantime I'd seen a doctor."

"Ah! You've seen a doctor? When was that?"

"Not quite a fortnight ago. I'd been in here just two days; I've now been fourteen in all; I've got every day and hour down in my diary; as you may imagine, I've studied myself with the greatest care and tried all sorts of things by way of experiment. I simply must know how much is exact repetition, and if it isn't where the variations come in, you see. But it all ends the same way. There's always an unaccountable 'x' that's constantly shifting, I suppose," he sighed.

"But tell me about the doctor. I thought you'd decided that this was quite out of their line."

"So I had, and so it is," he replied promptly. "I didn't go to a doctor to ask him to cure me."

"Then why——?"

"Well, I'd several reasons. One was that I'd met this man just once before, and for that reason alone he was part of my investigations. So far I'd experimented on people who'd met me twice, or three or four times before. I'm still experimenting, but at present the result seems to be that the better people know me the less they recognise me, and those who only knew me slightly take me for granted, I suppose."

"And did this doctor recognise you?"

"Well—there you are. I simply couldn't tell. I waited for him in the full light of a window; I gave him every chance; but—well, I'd had to send my name up, and he was expecting me, you see. He simply said 'How d'you do, Mr Rose' and shook hands. Probably he never looked at me. He knew that Mr Rose was waiting, and therefore the person who was waiting must be Mr Rose."

"So that was a wash-out. What else did you want to see him about?"

"Next, I wanted to be thoroughly vetted—as a man of thirty-three, you understand. It's all very well looking young, but you want to know whether you're really as young inside as you look. So I told him some sort of a yarn about an insurance policy and wanting to be overhauled for my own satisfaction before going to the company's doctor. So he asked me my age—thirty-three, I said—and ran all over me; and he was good enough to say that I was a very fine man and needn't worry about not being passed as a first-class life."

"And then?"

"Then I told him another cock-and-bull story. It was as an author that he'd met me before, you see, so I told him I was writing some fantastic sort of a book, and wanted one or two medical facts right. I had to go rather carefully here, of course, but I gave him, as nearly as I dared, an outline of what had happened, and asked him what about it."

"And what did he say?"

"He saw nothing very extraordinary in it," said Derwent Rose.

I jumped half out of my chair. "*What!* What madman was this?"

Then I saw the faint flicker of his smile, and sat down again.

"Quite a distinguished madman, George; incidentally he's a Knight. . . . But I don't want to pull your leg, old fellow. He didn't put it quite that way. What he actually did say was that the more a man studied these things the less he would swear that anything was an impossibility. And he's a remarkable man, mind you. I've not much use for the average doctor, but this fellow's big enough to use plain English and when he doesn't know a thing to say so. His knowledge isn't just how to conceal his ignorance. And he might have been a novelist himself from the way he instantly grasped what I wanted to know."

Not an impossibility! . . . I couldn't have spoken. I waited enthralled. Derry continued.

"So he began to talk about the ductless glands. Not just the thyroid. Everybody's got thyroid on the brain now; adays, but the thyroid's only one of them. There are a dozen others. And then he told me that practically nothing was known about them."

As I hadn't the faintest idea what a ductless gland was I continued silent.

"'Well, Mr Rose,' he said at last, 'if you want something of that sort to happen to one of your characters I should put him through the War and let him get a bash over the pineal gland.'

"'Where's that situated?' I asked.

"'Here,' he said."

And Rose tapped the middle of the back of his head with his forefinger.

"'And what would the effect of that be?' I asked; and he laughed.

"'Heaven above knows. You can say whatever you like. It might be anything.'

"'Would it account for actual morphological changes of tissue?' I asked.

“I wouldn't say it wouldn't; that would depend on the changes; but I should be very pleased to look through those portions of your proofs, Mr Rose,” he said. . . .

“So that was that. I went straight off to Cambridge Circus to get the Blair-Bell book, but, as I say, I saw you across the road, so I got the book somewhere else.”

“The pineal gland!” I murmured, dazed.

“Yes. One name for it's The Third Eye. Don't ask me to explain it. But if I understand my doctor-man the idea's something like this: There are these degenerated organs that man in his present stage of development has outgrown. A lizard's got what they call The Third Eye, and so has a lamprey, and lots of creatures. And the whole thing's the wildest nightmare imaginable. Takes you right back to fecund mud and the first seminal atom. One fellow, I forget his name, has a most hair-raising theory. He says that what they call the 'ancestral type' lived in the sea, rolling about like a log I suppose—anyway it doesn't seem to have mattered whether he was upside-down or not. So its back and front were both alike. But as time went on it was more often one way up than another, and the creature began to adapt itself. It grew new eyes where it found them most convenient and stopped using the old one. Very likely the old one's the pineal gland. Or words to that effect. . . . So if you're now a 'bilaterally symmetrical animal with forward progression,' and your front's where you back used to be, and anything goes wrong, you're a sort of Mr Facing-Both-Ways, with two memories like me and all the rest of it. . . . And a whole philosophy's been built up on it. Roughly, a man's spirit and matter interpenetrate throughout every particle of him so that there's no dividing them—everywhere except in one place. There they exist independently and side by side. All the mystery of life and death's supposed to be located there. And that place is the pineal gland.”

Remember, please, that this conversation took place, not in Bedlam, but in South Kensington. We were sitting in a commonplace loft over a garage, on ordinary chairs, with two



half-emptied glasses of everyday lemonade before us. A gas-jet in an incandescent mantle hung from the ceiling, and in the neighbouring houses average people were beginning to think of their accustomed beds. They had pineal glands too, and might "get a bash over them," or fall downstairs, or collide with something, or meet with a street accident. Would they, respectable ratepayers of South Kensington, revert to that dim time before the waters were divided from the dry land, when they had rolled about like logs, slumbering and amorphous and unspecialised types, creation's first blind gropings towards the glory that at present is man? Would they develop an "A" memory and a "B"? Would these "bilaterally symmetrical animals with forward progression" resuscitate that degenerated Third Eye in the backs of their heads and do this Widdershins-Walk back to their beginnings? Rose's friend the doctor had said that nobody knew anything about these things. Man was only on the verge of this knowledge. It belonged to to-morrow and the days to come.

And for the first time in my life I found myself wondering whether I did want to know so very much about those morrows after all.

At last I found my voice. "Then you accept that explanation?" I said.

"No," he replied.

"Thank God for something! Why not?"

"Oh, for various reasons. In the first place I only got it as a sort of fiction-stunt, remember. He merely said that nobody could contradict me."

"And in the second place?"

"In the second place, I still think yours is the better explanation—not biology at all, but simple right and wrong, good and evil. Nothing of that kind ever did happen to me in the War that I know of—I never got any whack over the head—and there's one other thing that seems to me to prove it."

"What's that?"

"That I do know the difference between the better and the worse, and want the better all the time."

"In other words—God?"

"I think God comes before a gland," he replied.

Quite apart from his extraordinary interview with his doctor, the past few weeks had been a series of the commonest everyday incidents mixed up with sheer impossibilities in the most bewildering fashion. As I stoutly refused to see his diagrams and the details of his diary (though I saw them later), I could only touch the fringe of his experience at that time. I gathered, however, that in those slowed-down pictures he had found a certain relief, as also in some music, particularly organ-music; and he had other alleviations of a similar nature. But I noticed that obstinately (as it seemed to me) he chose to regard the interval of time since I had last seen him, not as the three weeks it really was, but as the fortnight he had spent in that loft over the garage. Of the first of the three weeks he spoke not one single word. I need hardly mention the reason. He was looking farther back still. As he had been at thirty-five, so he had been in the twenties. Those "A" memories, so recent, were "B" memories too. . . . But that was a long way off yet.

Yet among so much vagueness and fluctuation one thing was abundantly clear. He had left behind him the last vestige of the man who had written *An Ape in Hell*. At the very least he was now the man who had written *The Vicarage of Bray*, and not impossibly he was an earlier man still. And here I had better say a word or two about the *Vicarage*, not as describing the book itself, but as isolating the stage he had reached and differentiating between his former and his present experiences of it.

It was, of course, the "Tite Barnacle" portions of the book that had pleased the public, supposing the public to have been pleased at all. Yet, witty as these were, they were the least essential parts of the work. The book had to be classed as Political, Social, Economic, or some welding of all three

descriptions; and Rose was never the man to approach a subject of this kind with his mind already made up. He recognised frankly (for example) that the mere mechanism of a Ministry or a Department is a gigantic thing, the men with the habit of running it necessarily few, and that to give control to an unpractised hand would be fatal. Thus his book was no mere slap at what it was the fashion some little time ago to call *The Old Gang*. He refrained from the common gibe that the surest qualification for success in one department is to have failed in another. Instead, he examined, first the machine, and then the man in charge of it. Between these two an accommodation has always to be found. No system of government will prove altogether a failure if it is in the hands of the right men, and equally none will work if it is in the hands of the wrong ones. So he sought the equilibrium between the two.

Not one reader in a million, laughing over that merciless and iridescent book that Julia Oliphant said he had written in little more than three months, had the faintest idea of the sheer burden of merely intellectual work that lay behind it. Piece by piece he had dissected the whole of our national economy before setting pen to paper at all. Bear with me for a moment if I take one little piece only—Shipping. It will give an idea of the scale, not so much of the *Vicarage* only as of that far vaster thing—the book he now projected and for the sake of which he clung so desperately to his “false middle” of thirty-three.

Men (he argued) need ships; but, over and above those who actually handle them, ships need men no less. From one standpoint ships exist in order that men may be carried from one place to another; but from the opposite standpoint a ship is merely a hungry belly that must be constantly fed with its human food—passengers. Without its meal of passengers it cannot live for a week. Thus, the Thing must move the Man from one place to another whether he wishes it or not, whether in itself it is desirable that he should be moved or not. The ships of one nation snarl at those of

another for this sustenance. Where then is the balance? Where does blind force get the upper hand, and where wise control? What happens if the power is usurped by a "Vicar" who can by no means be dislodged? . . . I need say no more. You see the yawning immensities of it.

And that was only Shipping. There were a hundred other things. He had applied his brilliant intellect to them all in turn, and had (as I may say) so "orchestrated" the whole that in the result it seemed the easiest of improvisations.

And now think what his present plan was!

He contemplated, not an analysis of one system, *but a welding of analyses of all systems!*

That was why he sought to juggle with his own years—that he might combine the enthusiasm of sixteen with the grasp and certainty and power of forty-five, and at the same time assure the coincidence between his past and his present impulses to create.

Montesquieu had never dreamed of such a work—Moses' task had been simpler.

Therefore I saw the position as follows:

He was thirty-three.

But thirty-three was a false middle.

He was in a rage to attempt a work for which no man had ever been equipped as he was equipped.

But the dazzling endeavour might elude him at any moment.

He would make that python-meal of material and produce a super-*Vicarage*.

But he might be thirty again before he digested it.

He was still hanging on, his enthusiasm at its keenest, his experience at its richest.

But he was hanging on as a straphanger hangs on—tottering, insecurely.

Once he had got going he would take a week off with me, a day with Julia Oliphant.

But not until he got going.

One thing was clear. He would have to give it up. If necessary he would have to be made to give it up. If I couldn't persuade him, Julia must. But already I saw the cost to him. He was an artist, with a passionate need to create. He was an artist so highly specialised that the creation of a small thing merely irritated him. But see where he was placed! So close to the dreamed splendour that he brushed it with his fingertips, and then perhaps to see it recede, diminish, go out! To be conscious of that inordinate power, and to have the agony of knowing that it could not last long enough for the task to be completed! To be unique, as he was unique, and yet to be forced to share the common bitterness and humiliation and despair! . . . A few moments ago I risked the word "impious." To my way of thinking it was impiety. If it was not impiety I do not see why Prometheus was bound.

For what was this monstrous right that Derwent Rose claimed, to put all the rest of us into the shadow of his own overweening and presumptuous glory? Who was he, to seize on immortality like this? Not satin slippers with poor little feet inside them that would soon, too soon be dust—not this was the sin. It was this other that is not forgiven. And man is forbidden to call his brother by the name that fitted Derwent Rose.

Poor Derry! Apparently he could do nothing right. As Julia had said, his whole life had been one marvellous mistake after another.

Suddenly I introduced Julia's name.

He had not moved since his last words some minutes ago—that he thought God was more than a gland. The mews outside had come to life again. Cars were returning from suppers and the theatres; the glare of their headlights played palely about the upper part of his window-frame. He now turned his head and smiled.

"Good sort, Julia. But she's forgotten all about me long ago."

"What makes you think that?"

But instead of answering my question he went musingly

on. "Funny, that. Dashed funny. I forgot all about Julia when I was making those notes."

"What notes?"

"Why, of the way I strike people. Those who remember me and those who don't. I remembered that doctor, who'd only seen me once, but Julia, who's known me practically all my life, I go and forget all about. In fact there's only about one other person who's known me as long as Julia has, and she absolutely failed to recognise me when I spoke to her a year or so ago."

My nerves became all jangled again. "Derry—*how* long ago?"

"About a year. . . . As you were. What am I talking about? Must stick to one scale of time, I suppose. I ought to have said about ten days ago."

"What was all this?" I asked, though I knew well enough; and he became grave as he unfolded another aspect of his singular case to me.

"It's difficult to explain to you, George, because you know the whole thing—though how you kept your reason when I told you I can't imagine; magnificently steady! . . . As a matter of fact this other person I mean was Mrs Bassett; you remember I'd been looking for her. Well, I met her one day and spoke to her"—he coloured a little at the memory of the details he suppressed; "and by Jove, it was a lesson to me! A perfectly hideous risk! I was on the point of telling her who I was when I drew back, just in time. God, how I sweated! I'm cold now when I think she *might* have recognised me. . . . Imagine the scene, George; woman screaming and falling down in a fit in the street because she thinks a ghost's spoken to her. And the ghost himself—this ghost"—he tapped his solid chest—"a ghost marched off between a couple of policemen—if two could hold me—I don't believe ten could—my strength's immense—immense——"

"But—but—then haven't you even a *name* to anybody who sees you more than once or twice?"

Slowly he shook his head. "You see. You see as well as I do. It seems to me that to everybody but you I'm simply dead. I can't go about giving people fits like that. That was a lesson to me, speaking to Daphne Bassett. I'll never do such a thing again. . . . So that cuts out Julia Oliphant. Pity, because she was a good sort. Always the same to me; just a pal. She used to give me expensive paste-sandwiches for tea when I knew she couldn't afford it; I used sometimes to stop away on that account. That was when she lived in Chelsea. Then I lost sight of her for a bit, but I've thought a good deal of her lately. I never had a sister. . . . Don't mind my running on like this, old fellow. I've nobody but you to talk to, nobody at all. Funny sort of situation, isn't it—a ghost like me mourning for living people? That's practically what it amounts to."

At something in his tone I interposed abruptly.

"Derry," I said, "you haven't been thinking of putting an end to yourself, have you?"

He stared at me for a moment.

"Eh?" he said. "Why not? Of course I have. One of the first things I did think of. I've been pretty near it, and if I find I can't write that book I shall be near it again. And"—he bent the grey-blue eyes solemnly on mine—"shall I tell you what *would* completely settle it? If anybody should see that ghost and scream! . . . I've got a most fearful power, George. A man who can make people scream as I could oughtn't to be at large. Ghosts ought to get where they belong—off the map altogether. My God, if it slipped out one day when I didn't mean it—just these three words—'I'm Derwent Rose'——"

Then suddenly his voice shook pitifully. He spread out his hands.

"George, old fellow, you can't imagine what a joy it was to see you at that place to-night! You haven't realised it yet—you don't know what I went through before I plucked up courage to speak to you. You're the only living creature I used to know that I *can* know now—the only one—the only

one on earth. I know them, but I daren't—daren't—let them know me. It gets very, very, very lonely sometimes——”

Lonely sometimes! My heart ached for him. It seemed to me that that loneliness was a gulf that all the pity in the universe could not fill. No, I had not realised. I had thought I had, but I hadn't. It now came quite home to me that, while he was free to make a new acquaintance at any moment he pleased, that acquaintance could hardly last longer than the moment in which it was made. For say it lasted for three weeks. At the end of those three weeks the hand he had taken would be three weeks older, but his own hand might be a hundred weeks younger. And so it must go on: hail—and farewell. He, beyond measure gifted, was denied this gift. He could not stop by the way to make a single friend. For others the calm and gentle progress to age, the greetings among themselves, the accosting by the loved familiar name; but Derwent Rose had no name. Without a name Daphne Bassett had set a dog on him; what would she have set on him had he said “I'm Derwent Rose”? Lightning was safer to handle than that name of his. It might miss—but it might hit, make mad, kill.

Sooner or later, I supposed, I should have to tell him that Julia Oliphant knew as much about his state as I knew myself. I had had no shadow of right to betray him to her thus. But in the meantime he was resolved that he would not turn that voltage of his identity either on to her or anybody else.

### III

In its way, one of the most singular portions of our conversation occurred when I asked him how he was placed as regards money. After all he must have money. Even a man who lives his life backwards must eat and have his boots soled, and pay twenty-five shillings a week for a loft over a garage. At first he seemed reluctant to answer me.



"I'm afraid I ran through rather a lot just at first," he said hesitatingly—his first admission that he had not inhabited Trenchard's garret for the whole of the time since I had last seen him. "But that will be all right. I can make lots of money."

"How?" ("Not by that book of yours," I said emphatically to myself.)

"Oh, you needn't worry about that. I assure you I can. I've thought it all out most carefully."

"I wish you'd tell me."

Then, eagerly, jerkily, he unfolded his maddest idea yet.

"I told you you hadn't grasped it. Nobody grasps it till they've got to live it. You see, it's all a question of time. Now look at it carefully. . . . I'm not fixed. I'm a constantly moving quantity. For that reason I can't take an ordinary job like anybody else. Oh, I could get one all right. It would be the simplest thing in the world for me to walk into one of these Sandow places, Ince's or Jones's or any of 'em, and say, 'Just pass me a few of those two hundred pound weights,' and scare 'em alive with what I could do. In fact that's the whole situation—I *should* scare 'em alive. You can't show pupils one man one day and perhaps a different one altogether the next; it isn't decent. Here's a nut for you to crack, George: I'm dead, a ghost. But my appearance is one of the most conspicuous things you ever saw. A man like me can't hide himself. The King or the Prince of Wales might walk down Piccadilly unrecognised, but not an athletic phenomenon like me. So as well as being the loneliest, I'm also one of the most public men living."

"So you propose to make money out of athletics?"

"Steady; let's take it as it comes. I've thought it all out, and I don't see a single flaw in it. Here's the problem: I want a large sum of money, I want to make it honestly, and if possible instantaneously, that is to say while I'm still stationary. Now how am I to do it?"

"You can't do it."

"Well, I say I can."

"How?"

You wouldn't guess in a hundred years what it was he proposed to do.

He intended to fight Carpentier.

"All in the fraction of a second, George," he said, appealing for my approval. "Knock-out punch for one of these mammoth purses, fix yourself up for life, and then disappear. It's absolutely sound reasoning."

"It's the craziest thing I ever heard."

"Why?" he asked, his eyes innocently on mine. "It's perfectly feasible."

"How would you get the match? Do you suppose any promoter would look at you? Would any champion? Would his manager let him? Remember that championship's a business. Champions make money as long as they're champions and no longer. They take no risks. And part of their business is to sidestep dangerous matches."

But he had an answer to that that evidently seemed to him conclusive. His eyes sparkled.

"Exactly! That's the very reason I picked Carpentier. Carpentier, man, Georges Carpentier! *He* isn't a sidesteper! He's the most thoroughgoing sportsman alive! Look at the way he gave that Yorkshire lad his match! Sidestep, that Frenchman? Look here. You know I speak French like a native. Well, I shouldn't in the least mind going straight up to him and putting the whole proposition before him."

"That you were out after his championship and incidentally his living?"

"Yes, and I jolly well know what he'd do."

"So do I. He'd turn you over to Descamps and the negotiations would last a couple of years. That isn't instantaneous."

"He'd do nothing of the sort. *That* great fellow? . . . Kiss me. He'd kiss me on both cheeks, shout '*C'est ça!*' and tell Descamps to fix it up straight away. Of course I wouldn't hurt him."

I stared. "*Could* you put Carpentier out?"

He laughed. A laugh was his reply.

“But suppose—an accident can always happen—suppose he put *you* out?”

This time I had not even a laugh for a reply.

He was fast asleep.

Asleep, dead off, and in that moment of time! The instant before his eyes had kindled at the thought of what a lark it would be to take on that peerless Frenchman and put him out; now, between a question and an answer, those eyes were closed and he slept profoundly.

With immense profundity. I bent over him and spoke his name in his ear. I shook him by the shoulder. He was unconscious of either action. His colour was blooming, his breathing deep and easy; else his sleep seemed to have the immensity of death itself. Under the glaring incandescent mantle he was theatrical in his beauty, superb in the relaxation of his strength. I could not take my eyes off him. It was almost frightening to see that complete annihilation of so much physical and mental power.

To write that book—and to fight Carpentier! He had worked it coolly and impudently out. The analytical faculties he would have brought to the one task he had merely applied to the other, and he had arrived at the perfectly logical answer that the way to make the maximum of money as nearly instantaneously as possible was to knock out Carpentier.

I could only gaze spellbound at him as he slept.

What to do now?

I was aware that this question had been waiting for an answer ever since we had left that picture-house in Shaftesbury Avenue. I had now found him, or he me; but what next? Let him go again? But apparently he did not want to go; he clung to me pathetically, as to the single companion he had in the world. Take him away somewhere? But he had refused to come, had urged that monstrous book. Was I to stay here with him, to stay all night, to stay till Trenchard's return? That was, to say the least, inconvenient.

Should I put him to bed? Somehow I hesitated to disturb that vast unconsciousness. Poor fellow, he richly earned all the rest he got.

I went into the bedroom, brought out Trenchard's quilt, and spread it over him. I moved his head gently to the padded portion of the wicker chair. I made him as comfortable as I could. Then once more I stood irresolute.

It was now after one o'clock, and that powerful sleep had cut us clean off in the middle of things. I had much, much more to ask him. I wanted to know his intentions about his rooms in Cambridge Circus, whether he thought of returning there, whether he wanted his furniture stored or sold. If to myself and Trenchard and possibly a few others he was still known as Derwent Rose, I wanted to know what his name was to the rest of mankind. Merely as a means of communication with people he did not wish to meet face to face, I wanted to know whether his handwriting had changed, whether he used a typewriter, what his signature was like.

And above all I wanted to know what steps I must now take with regard to Julia Oliphant.

Of course I intended to tell her everything, and to tell him that I had done so. The worst I should risk would be his momentary anger that I had betrayed him. He had wished to spare her a meeting with himself, but he had not known that she was unsparable. More than that, she was indissuable. I should not be able to keep her from him. And, if he clung so touchingly to me, found me so "magnificently steady," what comfort would he not find in that unvarying constancy of hers? He might break out on me for the moment, but he would bless me for it by and by.

I sat down in the other chair. I was very tired. I dozed.

In perhaps a quarter of an hour I opened my eyes again. He had not moved. It was a mild night, the deep chair was not uncomfortable, and I dozed again and again woke. Still he slept. I muttered a "Good night, poor old chap." I was too drowsy even to get up and turn down the incandescent light.

This time I slept as soundly as he.

Afterwards he blamed himself that he had not sent me away; but that sleep had dropped on him like a falling beam. All his sleep, he explained, was like that. Immeasurable chasms of time seemed to have passed away between his closing his eyes and his opening them again.

So this is what came next:

A light creaking of his chair brought me suddenly wide awake and sitting up. A peep of grey daylight showed in the upper portion of the window-frame, but the incandescent mantle still glared yellowly above his head. He had moved, but without waking. He turned his head and slumbered on.

But the turn of his head had brought his face into the light. . . .

He only shaved once a day, in the morning; and on the following morning he shaved again. But it was his whole beard that he thus shaved off daily, thirty days' growth in a night. He had had no set intention of growing that beard that I had seen in the hansom. A few days before coming to Trenchard's place he had woke up one morning, stroked his face, and found it there.

There he slept—in his golden beard.

#### IV

"Most certainly he shall write his book," Julia declared.

"Not if I can prevent it," I replied.

"We'll see about that. You don't think he'll give us the slip again?"

"I don't think so—I mean he doesn't seem to want to at present."

"And he was all right when you left him? Is he comfortable there? Had he a good breakfast? Was his bed made? Does anybody go in and clear up for him? Had he any flowers?"

"He's quite all right there. He wants to see me as much

as he can. He'd ask me to stay with him, but he's determined to get ahead with that book."

I did not tell her of any other reason why he might wish to be alone when he woke up in the morning. I assumed that a man's shaving operations could have no interest for her. But this is what had taken place:

On seeing his first signs of stirring I had slipped quietly into his bedroom. There, lying on his bed, I had pretended to be asleep. I had heard his tiptoe approach, the slight creaking of the door as he had peeped in, his stealthy crossing to the dressing-table, where his razors were. Then he had stolen out again, and I had heard a kettle filled and other preparations. A quarter of an hour later he had (as he supposed) woke me. He stood there by the bedside with a cup of tea in his hand. His chin was smooth. I wondered about that other morning when, passing his hand over his face, he had first found the beard there. And I wondered what his companion, if he had had one, had thought of it.

"But he shall write his book, poor darling," Julia repeated.

This was at half-past ten in the morning, in her studio, whither I had walked straight from Derry's loft over the mews.

"He ought to be locked up for life if he does," I answered.

But she was very obstinate. Derry (she said) should do whatever he had a mind to do. More than that (and a crafty light stole into her dark eyes as she said it), she intended to help him.

"To write his book? And what do you know about writing books?"

"I didn't say to write his book. You say he's—what d'you call it?—sharpening his tools, getting himself fit. Well, I can help him to do that."

"How?"

"I'll leave the door open so you can hear."

She ran out of the studio to the little cabinet where her telephone was. I heard the following, her side of the conversation that ensued.

"Is that 9199? Miss Oliphant would like to speak to Mrs Aird, please. . . . Is that you, Madge? Yes, this is my dinner-call. . . . Oh, like a top, and I know your phone's by your bed. Madge, my dear, I want to know who that learned person was I was talking to last night: yes, the bibliomaniac person. . . . Who?" Then, with a jump of her voice, "What, he's staying with you? He's in the house *now*? Do send for him immediately. . . . Of course not, you goose, but you have an extension, haven't you? . . ."

And then this:

"Oh, good morning! Miss Oliphant speaking. . . . Ah, you've forgotten! . . . Most frightfully excited about our conversation last night. Will you tell me again the title of that book and whether I can see it in the British Museum? Wait a minute, I want to write it down. . . ."

Then, carefully and as it were a letter at a time:

"*Manuel—du—Répertoire—Bibliographique—Universel*. . . . Yes, I've got that. . . . *Paris, 44, Rue de Rennes*. . . . Now the other book, please. . . . *Decimal Classification and Relative Index*. . . . Yes. . . . *Melvil Dewey*. . . . Is that enough to identify them?"

Then a rapid perfunctory gush, a "Thank you *so* much," the receiver clapped on again, and re-enter Julia, her face ashine with triumph.

"Well, did you hear all that?" she said. "You can take me along to the British Museum as soon as you like. You'll have to get me into the reading-room, because I haven't a ticket. Then if I were you I should trot away off to Haslemere."

"Who's that you were talking to?"

"A most fearful bore I met at the Airds' at dinner last night. At least I thought he was a bore then. Now he's a duck and an angel and I could kiss him all over his bald old head. Goodness is *always* rewarded, George, but not often the next morning like this." She clapped her hands.

"You're less comprehensible than ever I knew you, which is saying a good deal."

"Dear old George! When you're bald I'll kiss you too. And Derry *shall* write his book."

"And fight Carpentier?"

"Poodledoodle!"

And she flitted out again, unfastening her painting-blouse at the back as she went.

I knew enough of Miss Oliphant by this time to treat her apparent irresponsibilities with respect. I had never heard of either of the books of which she had spoken over the telephone, but I risked a guess at their nature—*Bibliographique Universel*—*Decimal Classification*—evidently the subject was indexing, and she had met somebody at dinner the night before who had led her into these arid fields. Naturally she had been bored. But now she was in a rapture of plotting and machination. She intended to assist and encourage Derry in that inordinate plan of his. She came in again, dressed for walking, humming a blithe tune.

"Dear, dear Providence! There was I ready to snap Madge's head off for seizing quite a nice man herself and giving me old Drybones, but now I'm going to send her some flowers. See the idea, George?"

"What are these books?"

"The very latest thing in the way of indexing. It lasted nearly the whole of dinner. Oh, I *love* myself for being so good! He drooled along, and I said 'How thrilling' and things like that, thinking of something else all the time, and now *this* gorgeous piece of luck!"

"A Universal Index?"

"Yes, of the whole of human knowledge. It's all done with decimals—or do they call them semicolons? Dots anyway. You can turn up anything from the solar system to a packet of pins at a moment's notice. If Derry doesn't know about it he'll dance with joy. . . . But come along. I must see those books. Let's go by bus. You can get me a reader's ticket, can't you?"

She pushed me out in front of her and closed the door with a reckless bang. All the way to the bus she talked as delightedly as if it had been her birthday.



"So I shall mug up those decimals and things and then go and be his secretary. I know more or less how he wrote his *Vicarage*. He used to stride up and down my room, thinking aloud about it. And this will be the same, only enormous! He says he wants to make it as Moses made his Decalogue? He shall, bless his heart. Why shouldn't he? I don't see your stuffy old objections, George."

"One of them is that Moses didn't 'make' the Decalogue. He went up into Sinai for it."

"Well, leave Moses out then. Any other reason?"

"I've told you. If it isn't exactly blasphemous, it's getting on that way."

"Why?" she said with heat. "Was the *Vicarage* blasphemous? He's simply going to do the *Vicarage* again, but on a huger scale. If he can write a gigantic book why should you say to him 'No, you mustn't write that—write a littler one instead'? He's perfectly entitled to write the biggest book he can. He's just as much entitled to it as you or any other writer. You only call it those names because it's bigger than yours."

She glowed with jealousy for his fame. He was her demi-god, and she would have had all the world bow down before him. She would *not* have him second to Homer—she would *not* have him second to Shakespeare. At least so it struck me, and I could only shake my head again and again and repeat that in my opinion it was not a legitimate ambition.

We had mounted to the top of a motor-bus, where we occupied a back seat. For some minutes she did not speak. Then, as she still continued silent, I looked at her face. At the same moment her face turned to mine.

What worlds away from the truth I was that clear look told me. His fame? She didn't care twopence for his fame, except that it might amuse him. His book? She didn't care whether he wrote his book or whether he didn't. To her, fame and books were the vanities with which men so incomprehensibly amuse themselves when they might be thinking of something that mattered. It was enormously

more than that that her eyes told me on the top of that east-bound bus that morning.

For if he wished to remain thirty-three, she too as intensely wished and willed it. He should write any book he wanted, do anything on earth he liked, so long as that loft in a South Kensington mews became an upper room in Cremorne Road all over again. She would flutter about, pretending to be indexing the whole mass of human knowledge for him, clipping and pasting and filing within sound of his voice; but what she would really be doing would be to cut *Patum Peperium* sandwiches for him, to see that he fed himself properly, opened his windows, made his bed, had his washing and mending properly done. That former *Vicarage* period had been the summer of her life; she would now thrust herself in the way of it once more. That she might do so with some sort of countenance she was on her way to read those thorny books in the British Museum. The latest thing in indexing was the bait with which she set the trap of her adoration. She would humour, encourage, wheedle, praise. But she too would have her summer twice.

We did not speak again until we descended in Tottenham Court Road and walked along Great Russell Street. Then as we approached the Museum railings she turned abruptly to me. She wanted her final confirmation of the facts.

"You've told me all that he said about me?"

"Yes." (This was untrue. I had suppressed one thing. I had not told her that he had sometimes stayed away from Cremorne Road because she bought things for him she could not afford.)

"And he's no idea at all that I know anything whatever about it?"

"None whatever."

"Tell me again about his having sometimes thought of me lately."

I did so. "For all I know he might even have come to see you but for the fear of giving you that shock."

"Well, you didn't die of the shock, so why should I? Come and get me my ticket."

We passed through the glazed doors and along the Roman Gallery. I rang at the closed door where the temporary tickets are obtained. There was no difficulty, and slowly we walked past the double row of Cæsars and Emperors again. I had taken her arm. Somehow I suddenly felt as though I were about to lose her, perhaps for a long time, perhaps for an even longer one. I spoke in a low voice.

"Do you think it will be—safe? Just to walk in on him, I mean. Wouldn't it be better to prepare him first?"

"No, no—that's the one thing I *am* sure of."

"Are you sure you can trust yourself?"

"I don't know. If I can't there's an end of everything, so I must."

"What about our going together?"

"No, nor that either." She flushed a little as she said it.

I think, though I am not sure, that there was jealousy in that flush. In that unspeakable solitude of his Derry had so far only a single friend—myself. She was prepared, if she could, to steal my share of him, to have him all to herself.

"But I've got to see him to-day; I promised it," I said.

"Then off you go now, while I'm here. But you're not to say a word about my coming. Then if I were you I should get off to Haslemere."

She meant I had better get out of the way altogether. I sighed. . . . "Well, come and get your books."

We sought the reading-room, and I put her into a seat and passed to the catalogue counter. I took her slips to her for signature, dropped them into the basket, and then returned to her. It was early, and few readers had yet arrived. We were in the "N" bay, which we had to ourselves. I saw her look up at the million books, dingy and misty in the pale light of the high rotunda. I saw her dark eyes travel along the frieze of names in tarnished gold—Carlyle, Tennyson, Browning. In the past I have spent a good deal of

time in the reading-room; now it is a place I get out of as quickly as I can. It crushes me, annihilates my spirit with the weight of the vanity of vanities. Of the makers, as well as of the making of books, there is no end. They are born, they lisp, they spell, they write; and then they die. The eager heart, the busy brain, are a few tarnished letters on a frieze, a strip of paper gummed into the casualty-list of a catalogue. We think, write, and to-morrow we die. Only one man was not going to think, write, and die to-morrow. He was going to be different from all men who had gone before him. Because of something that had happened to him, he was going to blazon his name, not in that circular cemetery of dead books, but across the whole width of the heavens outside.

And this tired woman trifling with the tips of her long fingers against the book-rest as she waited for her books was going to be his accomplice. She was going, by means of something called love, to keep him at that acme of his powers where innocence and wisdom met and in the past he had thrown her a friendly word from time to time. She was going, single-handed, to arrest that backward drift of his life. Whatever had caused it should be thwarted in her. He should *not* be thirty. He *should* remain, if she could compass it, thirty-three for as long as he wanted—for the rest of his life and hers.

I wondered the dome did not fall on her.

Presently she turned her head and smiled in my eyes.

“Well, don’t you wait, George. Thanks so much. Good-bye.”

I left her sitting there, in that vast and brown-hued well, still waiting for her books.

PART IV  
THE DOUBLE CROSS



## I

A conspicuous feature about my small house in Surrey is its lake—eighty yards by forty of clear dark water among the oak and willows, spring-fed and with trout in it. This lake lies immediately in front of the house, where other houses have their lawns. It needs a good deal of attention, for springtime sheddings that are charming on grass are messy on water, and nothing but wind can sweep the glossy surface. But its infinite variety of mood lights up the whole place like a smiling eye, and I am very attached to it.

Not more than a quarter of an hour's bicycle-ride away is a preparatory school for boys up to the age of fourteen.

Need I say that I have had to put up a diving-platform at one end of the lake?

There are, of course, certain rules: bicycles to be left at the potting-shed, diving from the punt not allowed, not more than four bathers at one time, etc., etc. But within these limits the pond is as much theirs as mine, and seldom a summer afternoon passes without a bathing-party.

I had done Julia's bidding and had come back home again. It had been on a Wednesday morning that I had left her waiting for her books in the reading-room of the British Museum. It was now Friday, and I had not heard a word either of her or Derry.

I had tried not to think of them. Finding that impossible, I had wandered restlessly up and down, no good to myself or to anybody else. On Thursday, and again on Friday, I had almost returned to London. I could not shake off that picture of her, sitting alone in that dreary rotunda of accumulated human knowledge. Had she started that crack-brained index, he his terrifying book?

Had she gone to him? What had she said? What had he replied? I could neither guess nor forget about it. As if he had infected me with something of his own calamity, my mind too was in two places at the same time—among the Surrey oaks and sweet-chestnut, and in that loft where he had lived over the South Kensington mews.

My study is an upper room at the front of the house, with French windows that open on to a wide verandah. I often drag out a table and work outside. But work that morning was impossible. I was too unsettled even to answer letters. So I walked out on to the verandah and leaned on the ramblered rail. The oaks across the lake were turning from gold to green, and the two big willows by the diving-stage were a ruffle of silver-grey. Under the clear surface the trout were basking shadows. I wished the afternoon were here. It would at least bring the boys to bathe.

Suddenly I heard my housekeeper's step on the verandah behind me. She always walks straight through the study if she gets no answer to her knock.

"Miss Oliphant," she announced.

I nearly jumped out of my skin.

"Miss Oliphant! Where?"

"In the drawing-room, sir."

In five seconds I was through the study and half-way downstairs. The drawing-room is a cool, low-ceilinged apartment at the farther end of the house. It has windows on two of its sides, those to the north green with brushing leaves and a ferny bank, the others glazed doors that that morning stood wide open. As I entered I heard mingled laughter.

They both stood there.

They were silhouetted against the sunny opening, laughing like a couple of children. Perhaps the joke was that Julia only had been announced. I stood watching them for a moment; then I advanced.

"Good morning," I said.

Julia gave a swift turn. The next moment she had pushed Derry forward:



"You explain—I wash my hands of it," she laughed.

She wore thick shoes and a walking-costume, and on her head was a little felt hat with a pheasant's feather. He had on an old tweed jacket and grey flannel bags. He held out his hand.

"Hope we're not dragging you from your work, George," he laughed. "Do you good anyway. I felt like a day off, so I dug out Julia. 'Down tools, Julia,' I said; 'no work to-day. Where shall we go? Shall we give George Coverham a surprise?' So here we are, to lunch, please. By Jove, there's a kingfisher!"

He sprang out on to the terrace to see where the electric-blue flash had whistled off to.

Swiftly I glanced at Julia. In her eyes was the old deep shining. But Derry called over his shoulder:

"That was a young one, wasn't it? Is there a nest? How many hatched out? Do they go for the fish?"

He seemed splendidly fit, perfectly happy. He seemed so happy that suddenly I wondered what I had been making myself so miserable about. A weight seemed to lift all at once from my mind. Too much London had oppressed me, I supposed. Cambridge Circus is not the place for a country-living man to stay too long in. It bred too many fancies. Much better for the Circus-dweller to come into the country.

"It went over by that bank," Derry was saying, still peering after the kingfisher; and I stepped out.

"Yes. The nest's right in the bank. Six of them hatched. You'll see another in a minute."

But at that moment his eyes fell on the punt. Quickly he turned to Julia.

"Years since I've had a punt-pole in my hand!" he exclaimed. "Is it in working order, George? Come along——"

"You go, Julia," I said; and I returned into the house to see about lunch.

What had happened? Had he really brought her out for the day on his own account, as formerly he had used to do?

Or was she allowing him to think that he had? Was he repeating himself even textually, in those words "Down tools, Julia, no work to-day"? I must know. It was essential that I should know. Yet already something in his manner told me that I should not learn it from him. He was here not to talk about himself, but to enjoy, keenly and vividly, every moment of his day. Whatever my own megrims had been, he showed none. Not he, but Julia, would have to explain matters.

Suddenly I took a resolution. I pushed at a baize door.

"Mrs Moxon!" I called.

My housekeeper appeared.

"Would it be upsetting your arrangements if I asked my visitors to stay for the week-end?" I asked.

She considered a moment; then she thought it could be managed. But she seemed puzzled.

"It is Mr Rose, isn't it?" she said.

Derry, I may say, had been to my house twice or thrice before.

"Of course."

"I thought it was, sir, but they told me only to say Miss Oliphant."

"Oh, that was their little surprise for me," I replied. "Very well, Mrs Moxon. Lunch, and I'll ask them to stay for the week-end. My sister left a few things, didn't she?"

"That'll be all right, sir. I'll see to Miss Oliphant."

I came out of the house again and sought the lake. They were out in the middle of it, lying down in the punt together with their heads over the side. They were watching the trout. I was on the point of hailing them when I refrained. Something dramatic in their juxtaposition pulled me up short.

Their heads were together, their laughter came across the water. She *was* having her summer again. But what would it cost her? Her unchanging adoration—and his affectionate indifference! He had never cared, he never would care. To-morrow he would have forgotten all about it. But she would have still another day's memories to add to those

others when he had jumped five-barred gates with his pipe in his mouth and his stick in his hand—memories of my punt and pond and the greening oaks and the silvery willows. . . . Yet she was laughing as carelessly as he. They were playing a game. A willow-leaf had floated like a fairy shallop towards them, and he was blowing it her way, she blowing it back again.

Then a dragonfly caught their attention, and they forgot the willow-leaf, as instantly as children forget.

At lunch I sat with my back to the open windows, they where they could look out. Apparently he had completely forgotten that night, only three days ago, when he had told me that I was the only one of his old acquaintances to whom he dared reveal himself. He called her Julia, she him Derry, and to both of them I was George. We laughed, joked, said anything that came into our heads; but beneath it all I was in an extreme of curiosity. *How* had they come together? *What* had happened that there was now a second person in the world to whom he could pronounce his name?

Half-way through lunch I made my proposal that they should remain for a couple of days. His brow suddenly clouded. I watched him carefully, and I knew that Julia was watching him as carefully as I.

"Awfully good of you, George," he said in a suddenly altered voice, "but I really don't think I can spare the time. I only downed tools for one day, you know. I really must get back."

"But to-morrow's Saturday. I promise to let you go on Sunday evening if you really must."

"I'm so fearfully busy, you see," he said uneasily.

Under the table I felt Julia's foot touch mine. She spoke.

"Fancy Derry talking like a minor novelist about being busy!" she laughed. "Why, you always used to say that if it was as hard work as all that something was wrong and ought to be seen to!"

His brow instantly cleared again. "That's so," he said. "Did I say that? I'd forgotten. Busyness is all bunk, of course; made for duffers. A thing either does itself or it doesn't. . . . Right, George, I'll stop if Julia will. I hope you won't mind if I go to bed rather early though. I really have been hard at it, and I need a lot of sleep."

"This air'll make you sleep," I assured him. I did not add that if he wished to go to bed early lest he should sink into abysmal sleep in the middle of a sentence he should have his wish. Razors and a spirit-lamp were going to be put into his room. A little teapot and caddy would also be placed there. I intended to tell Mrs Moxon that he was faddy about his early-morning tea. He might then use his hot water for any purpose he wished.

We took coffee outside, and then went for a stroll round my few acres. In the kitchen-garden he had a new idea. Over a hedge at one end of it, well out of the way, was a rather unsightly dump of old household rubbish—tins, burst buckets, old zinc baths, broken utensils of every kind. A few spadefuls of earth are thrown over these from time to time, and a handful of nasturtium-seeds once in a while helps to mitigate the eyesore.

"You want an incinerator, George," he announced. "Here's all your stuff ready. Hammer this old junk out flat, get the blacksmith to cut a few rods, a cartload of stones and a few barrowloads of clay, and there you are. Lots of fine ash for your beds too, though I shouldn't think this soil needed much. Got a pencil? I'll show you——"

He made rough sketches of the incinerator on the back of an envelope.

We strolled back to the pond and the punt again, and he threw off his coat, turned up his sleeves, and poled us up and down. He glowed with vitality and power. Both for strength and delicacy of touch he did whatever he liked with the punt. One beautifully-finished little feat he performed. A blossom of water-starwort floated on the pond some fifteen yards away. Julia's hand was trailing lazily in the water.

"Keep your hand just as it is," he ordered her.

She had only to close her fingers on the blossom. With one perfect stroke, one complicated thrust of the pole, that included I knew not what components of opposite forces reconciled to one end, the flower sped swiftly to her hand and rested there. There was no jar, only a thrilling as of a sound-board as the punt fetched up still. He laughed with pleasure at his skill.

Then at that moment I heard the sound of boys' voices. The bathing-party had arrived. I turned to Julia.

"They come every afternoon. Would you like to go up to the house, or will you stay here in the punt under the trees?"

"Oh, in the punt, please," she said; and Derry turned quickly.

"Bathing? Did you say boys were going to bathe? I say, that's rather an idea! Got a spare costume, George?"

Across the lake a stripling figure stood on the diving-stage with a towel about his shoulders. It was Du Pré Major. He dropped the towel, stood poised, and then came the sound of a plunge. Derry's eyes shone. In a moment he had put the punt in under the trees.

"That's done it," he laughed. "Can I ask your house-keeper for a towel?"

"You know my room. You'll find everything you want there."

"Right. I've nearly forgotten how to swim——"

He stepped from the punt and ran lightly round the pond.

Julia's wet fingers still held the flower. Her head hung a little down, so that the light from the water was thrown softly up on to her face. Her eyes, but her eyes only, moved as the sound of another plunge was heard; but it was only the other Du Pré and Southby. I did not speak. There would be time enough for talking after Derry had gone to bed—early.

Then over by the house a gleam of white appeared. It was Derry with a robe of towelling over his shoulders. He did not take the path to the diving-board; instead, he

dropped the towel on a grass border, looked aloft for a moment, and then took a straight run at one of the willows. It was a "cricket-bat" willow, and it overhung the diving-board at an angle out of the vertical. How he managed the leap I do not know, but in a moment he was up the tree like a squirrel, poised in the fork, laughing down at the surprised boys on the stage below.

"Stand clear," he called.

His path through the air was a swallow's. There was a soft plunge, a hissing effervescence as of black soda-water, and he shot to the surface again like a javelin, a dozen yards away.

"Oh, ripping plunge, sir!" one of the boys called rapturously. "Jimmy! Did you see it? Did you see that?"

"Come in—let's make a dog-fight of it!" Derry cried.

And one after another they tumbled in and splashed towards him.

I have been told that that Friday's four are still the envied of the whole school. He was very wonderful with them. The dog-fight over he set to work to coach them. They had never seen the stroke that consists of turning the left leg from the knee downwards into a screw-propeller, so that the swimmer travels forward, not in a series of impulses, but at a uniform rate of progress. He showed them in the water, and then hoisted himself to the diving-platform and showed them there. The stage became a comical waggling of nubile white legs.

"No, no," his voice came to us, "from the knee—think of a screw—and about a six-inch stroke with your left hand—it's worth learning—makes swimming as easy as walking——"

"Show us a racing-stroke, sir——"

"Shut up, Jimmy. Is this right? It does catch your knee, though——"

"Do that dive again, sir——"

Then, when Derry judged they had had enough of it, he ordered them out. He himself did a final dash of the whole eighty yards and back again, while the water boiled

behind him. Then he sought his wrap and disappeared into the house.

"He's 'some' swimmer, isn't he?" said Julia softly. She had neither spoken nor moved.

He was.

But even I could see that he knew nothing of women.

The bit of water-starwort was still in her hand. Suddenly with a little laugh she tossed it over the side.

"Oughtn't he to have some tea?" she said. . . .

I do not wish to labour the details of that afternoon. I may say that already I had a very distinct and curious impression of them, namely, that they *were* details, isolated and without continuity; but I will come to that presently. We sat rather a long time over tea, and Derry talked. The only subject he seemed to avoid was that of his work. Otherwise he was alert, keen, dead "on the spot." On athletics he was extraordinarily illuminating. Granted that as an engine his body was pretty near perfection; it was on the "fundamental brainwork" of the subject that he laid the greatest stress. The modesty of the demonstrations which he made on the verandah before our eyes was altogether charming; he was as simple and earnest with us as he had been with the boys. For such-and-such a performance (he showed) your balance *must* be thus and thus; for swiftness, a certain speed of movement *must* be the perfectly-synchronised sum-total of half a dozen different speeds. I am no very remarkable athlete myself; I have always supposed that I lacked some special gift; but Derry spoke almost as if, by the mere taking of thought, he could add a cubit to his leap or plunge. He took his sport and his writing in very much the same way. You "just helped nature all you could."

Then he was back on the subject of the incinerator again.

Shortly after that it was an oak that ought to be lightened on one side unless I wanted to have a hole torn in the bank of my pond.

Then, dinner over, he began to fidget. This was at a little after eight o'clock. At twenty past he rose abruptly.

"It's that bathe I suppose," he yawned. "If you don't mind I think I'll turn in. You said I might, you know——"

"I'll show you up," I said.

"Don't trouble," he replied, Julia's hand in his.

But I wanted to make sure that the tea-caddy was where I had told Mrs Moxon to put it.

## II

On the night when he had half scared me out of my wits with that horrible demonstration with the electric torch on the edge of the bamboo table, he had been careful to explain that he was putting the question in its most elementary form. There were (he had said) other factors, and more important ones. One of these had already occurred to me. Stated as simply as possible, it was this:

As he had held the torch that night, with that notch that "had got to be thirty-three" in the middle of the illuminated edge, about six inches on either side of the notch had come within the lamp's beam. "Keep your eye on that edge and never mind the other dimensions," he had said, and he had proceeded to manipulate the lamp.

*But how had he determined the distance at which the lamp must be held from the table's edge?*

You see the enormous importance of this. The lighted portion of the edge was the extent of his memory, faculty or whatever one may call it. But what about that memory's *quality* as distinct from its extent? Suppose, instead of holding the torch a foot away, he had held it three inches away only? The nearer the shorter—but the brighter; the farther away the longer—but the dimmer. Our childish recollections are intense, but of small things; as we grow older we remember more, but more vaguely. . . . I find that I shall have to make use of the parallel columns again. Indeed I begin to suspect that I shall have to do so throughout. Was this then the position?



BY APPROACHING THE  
LAMP

He might re-live a given age again with great intensity.

Emotion or passion might become predominant characteristics, at the expense of intellectual comparisons.

He certainly would not succeed in any task that demanded width of outlook first of all.

He might concentrate so brilliantly as to perform a momentary and sensational feat—say to knock out Carpentier.

A summer's day in the country might be almost unbearably beautiful to him.

BY WITHDRAWING THE  
LAMP

The intensity would diminish but the scope of memory would enlarge.

He might become comparative, critical, philosophic, but at the cost of intensity of emotional experience.

He might be in danger of including so much that he would become diffuse and pointless.

The speculative man might get the upper hand of the practical one and he would fail in a supreme momentary effort—in other words, Carpentier would knock him out.

It would be merely a matter of fresh air and exercise, to be set off against the working hours lost and the cost of two railway tickets.

I am anxious not to go beyond my brief. I knew that for the purpose of his book he was attempting to manipulate himself, but what his success had so far been I did not know. Nevertheless all the possibilities had to be considered, and the more I thought of this one the more it impressed me. For practical purposes, these differences of memory-intensity might turn out to be the pivot on which all else turned.

For suppose that he had no choice but to go back and re-open the closed book of his life, and that nothing that Julia or I could do would stop him. Whether in that case

was the better: to live as it were day by day and hour and hour, with joy and grief experienced at their highest pitch, or to continue to possess to the full this unique and double knowledge, of a past that had been a future and of a future that was once more a past?

To put it in another form, since he must do this Widder-shins Walk, was it better for him to know he was doing it, or to do it knowing as little as possible about it?

Or, in its simplest form of all, would he be happier with or without a memory of any kind?

I said good night to him at the door of his room and closed it behind me. I had not taken more than a couple of steps when I heard him softly lock it. I went down to Julia in the drawing-room.

Even on a warm summer's evening, when the windows stand wide open, I like a wood fire. Outside the heavens were a beauteous pink glow, with one amber star. The trout were rising for their evening meal, and a sedge-warbler sang short sweet phrases. From time to time a moorhen scuttered along the surface of the pond, and the smell of night-flowering tobacco floated into the quiet room. But Julia had no wish to go out. Into a pair of my sister's slippers she had thrust her worsted-clad feet, and she was toasting her toes and smiling into the fire.

"Is that window too much for you?" I asked.

"No."

"Then put this shawl over your shoulders. You'll have hot milk to go to bed with."

"Thank you, George."

"And now," I said, drawing up my chair opposite to her, "tell me what's happened since Wednesday."

She mused. "Happened to him?"

"I want to know *all* that you did. Did you go to him?"

"No. He turned up at the Boltons this morning and dragged me out, exactly as he said."

"But——"

"Oh, I'd sent him a note."

"Ah! I wondered. . . . What did you say?"

"It was only a couple of lines. I forget what the exact words were. I merely said that I shouldn't be in the least afraid of anything, and that anyway I hadn't a dog to set at him. Just that. Nothing else. I wrote it in the Museum after you'd gone."

"And that fetched him round?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he say?"

She hesitated. "That's just it, George. He hasn't even referred to it."

"What, not in any way?"

"Not in any way."

"He just came into the Boltons as if nothing had happened, and he's talked all day as if nothing had happened?"

"That's exactly it."

"He's not mentioned his book?"

"Only what you heard at lunch."

"He is writing it?"

"One would gather so. You know as much about it as I do."

I gazed into the fire. A louder splash came from the pond—one of the three-pound rainbows. Julia resumed of her own accord.

"You see, when you left me in the Museum I really didn't know what to do. After what you'd told me I didn't want to risk upsetting him by simply walking in to his place unannounced. So I wrote that note, and he'd get it last night. And he was round early this morning. But he hasn't even mentioned the note. I suppose he got it, but things aren't in the least like what you told me. You told me he was passionately grateful at finding you. Well, that doesn't at all describe his manner to me. He's jolly, keen, full of enjoyment and zest at everything that comes along—and that's all. He *must* have understood my note; that's why I put in that bit about the dog; if he didn't understand he'd have to ask what *that* meant. But not one single word. What do you suppose has happened?"

A little disingenuously I asked her what she meant by "happened."

"To him of course. I've told you all *I* did. It must have been rather heartrending between you two; so why this perfect composure now that there are three of us?"

I didn't know. I was a little afraid to guess. But again I pondered that distance of the torch from the table's edge. . . . Julia was still gazing into the fire, her long hands between her knees, so that her walking-skirt shaped them. Then suddenly she looked from the fire to me.

"How many things has he talked about to-day, since he's been here?" she asked abruptly.

I moved uneasily. "Oh—how many things does one talk about in a day? Hundreds," I replied.

"But—at such a *pitch!*" She threw the word at me with almost accusatory energy. "Top-note all the time—birds' nests, punts, athletics, incinerators, those boys bathing——"

Less and less at my ease, I could only urge that a holiday was a holiday, and that Derry might as well have stayed at home as bring his cares with him.

"You think it's just that?" she demanded, looking me full in the face.

"I should say so."

"Hm!"

But in spite of that rather critical "Hm!" she seemed reassured. Suddenly she gave a soft chuckle.

"He was rather wonderful with those boys," she said.

"They're nice boys."

"What a games-master he'd make!" Then, with a sly and guilty look in her eyes, "What shall we do to-morrow, George? Oh, it's ripping luck, being here unexpectedly like this!"

"What would you like to do? There's the car if you want to go anywhere!"

"N—o," she said reflectively, as if running over in her mind a dozen delectable plans. "I think just potter about here. Rushing about in cars . . . no, it's perfectly ador-

able here. I don't want to set foot out of your grounds. George, you are a duck!" She hugged herself.

Whether he was living from moment to moment or not, there was no doubt about her. She basked shamelessly. I am not making her out to be anything she was not. She was a ready, practical creature, by no means above what is called feminine littleness, not very young, but with her own beauty. It was, too, her beauty's hour. Sitting there between the firelight and the fairness of the evening outside, long-throated, cool-browed, with the glow of the wood-flames richly in her eyes, her body seemed an ivory lamp that guarded its light with sacred and jealous care. And that flame was to all intents and purposes stolen. She now intended, calculated, planned, contrived. Up to that moment I had supposed her to be waiting (as it were) in that remembered Sussex village, waiting at the centre of whatever mystery had happened to him, waiting for him to come back to her. But now I knew that she was doing nothing so passive. She was *not* waiting. She was prepared to bring events about. To the little that he had spared her on his forward journey she was prepared to help herself immeasurably as he returned. Like a footpad she watched his drawing-near. Sitting there by my fire, with that day's memories still glowing about her, she was contriving further ones for the morrow. . . .

And suddenly the whole scope of her daring flashed upon me. At twenty-eight she had failed to get him. Now, at forty, she would not scruple to make use of whatever arts she had since acquired.

*She would, if she could, marry Derwent Rose.*

I cannot tell you my stupefaction at my own discovery. It was wellnigh with awe that I looked at her. For in that case her adventure was hardly less tremendous than his own. That is what I meant when I said that he began to constrain us and to draw us into the wheel of his own destiny. To marry a man of diminishing age! To marry a man who had lately been forty-five, was now at some un-

known point in the neighbourhood of the thirties, and would presently miraculously re-attain adolescence! What unheard-of marriage was this?

As if she enumerated something to herself, one slender finger-tip was on another. "First I shall go with him to the blacksmith's about those rods," she said softly.

I avoided her gaze. "I don't know," I said, "that I want an incinerator built."

"But Derry wants to build it," she answered, as if that settled the question.

"He may have forgotten all about it to-morrow."

Swiftly she turned on me. "What do you mean by that?"

"The plain meaning of the words—he may have forgotten."

"Do you mean something about his memory?"

"Which memory? He's two of them—so far."

"Tch! . . . You just this moment said that he was deliberately putting things away from him because this was a holiday. Did you say that just to keep me quiet? Don't you believe it yourself?"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve. I simply don't know."

"Oh, you're tiresome! . . . In plain English, then: are you suggesting that when he came to me this morning, the only reason he didn't mention my note was that he had forgotten all about it in the night?"

I shrugged my shoulders. It all happened in the night. That was why he went to bed early. That was why I had given him a spirit-kettle for tea—or shaving. Something might have happened during the night of which she spoke. Something might be happening in my house at that very moment.

"Do you mean his memory's cracking up?" she demanded.

"I think we could find out."

"How?"

"By getting him to talk about his book. To write that book he must draw on both his memories, experiences, or whatever you like to call it. That's his whole equipment

for it—two conscious experiences, with himself balanced in the middle making the most of both. We might find out that way.”

“Oh, there’s a shorter way than that,” she said.

“What?”

“To ask him.”

I shrugged my shoulders again. “Yes. . . .”

And then I took her entirely off her guard. Outside the pink had turned to peach, and the amber star had become a diamond. Suddenly, as they do, the trout had ceased to rise, and a single short squawk came from the moorhens’ nest. I rose and stood before her.

“Julia,” I said without warning, “*would* you marry him?”

She might not have heard. I thought she was never going to reply. She drew the shawl a little more closely about her shoulders, and I crossed the room and closed the windows. Then I returned to my place in front of her.

At last she spoke.

“I suppose you may ask that,” she said. “The answer is—Yes.”

“You’ve considered it?”

“Yes.”

“Everything it would mean?”

“Yes.”

“And you think you’ve—the right?”

She stared at me. “The right?”

“Yes, the right. Look at it this way. There’s no doubt at all about one thing; he isn’t the same man to-day, or at any rate he isn’t in the same mood, that he was two days ago. He may be just deliberately putting his work aside for a day, or—he may be the other thing. He may be going on with his book on Monday morning—or he may be quite past it already. It makes a good deal of difference to you which of these two men he is.”

“It makes no difference.”

“Oh yes it does. In the one case you’d be simply his secretary, and things would be more or less as they were before. But for the other he wouldn’t want a secretary.

That mad book would be all over and done with. You saw him as he was to-day: one quick brilliant impression after another. That man might write a few vivid short stories, but never that appalling book. . . . Look here, Julia, I didn't want to tell you, because the whole idea gives me a shudder; but this is the way he explained it himself."

And without any more ado I told her of his demonstration with the electric torch and of my own additions thereto.

She was not afraid of much, that woman. I had almost written that she took it perfectly calmly, but that was just what she did not do. But it was no fear of immensity and the blackness of Infinity that she showed. Rather she seemed to see an opportunity to be snatched at. That face that I have likened to the ivory of a lamp betrayed the soft radiance that she tried to, but could not hide.

"Yes, that gives it," she breathed.

"So you see what I mean by 'having the right.' You'd be there, the nearest, the brightest, vider than everything else. . . . *Have* you the right?"

She laughed softly. "You mean I'm a baby-snatcher?" she said.

I did not reply.

For that was about the size of it. Did he remain in that mood, there she would be in the punt with him, or holding iron rods for him as he set out the plan of the incinerator, or hunting with him for the kingfishers' nest, or watching him as he bathed with to-morrow's batch of boys. He would blow little boats of willow-leaves to her, bring water-blossoms gliding into her hand. To-morrow evening they would watch that amber star together, stroll along my winding paths as the glow-worms came out. That was to be her theft—to press herself home in the glamorous irresistible moment, let what would afterwards befall. My modest little estate was to be her antechamber to paradise, and unwittingly I had set open the gates of it for her myself.

And she was laughing at me for it—openly laughing at me.

"Well—the portrait for the Lyonnaise Club's getting along very nicely, George," she laughed.



"Dear, dear Julia——" I began.

"That earnest expression's rather good. What a pity I didn't bring my painting-tools—we might have got a good day's work done to-morrow."

"My dear——"

Then, suddenly, "How long have you actually known Derry, George?" she demanded.

"About fifteen years."

"Not longer? Then you don't know what's coming next?"

I don't like to be smiled at as she was smiling. I jumped up.

"Yes I do," I said with a flush. "What's coming next is that you're not going to do this. You're going to promise me not to. Be his secretary, his nurse, his housekeeper, anything else you like, but you're not to do this. It it's nothing else it's——"

"Taking a mean advantage, you mean?" she supplied the words for me. "But he never did know anything about women. Why shouldn't he learn, poor dear?"

"Julia, you *can't* have thought! A man without an age! A man, except for you and me, without even a name a week together! A man who says of himself that he's to all intents and purposes a ghost haunting anybody who happens to know anything about him! . . . Anyway you shan't."

"Shan't I, George?" she asked with a long deep look into my eyes.

"That you shall not."

She too rose and stood before me, one elbow on the mantelpiece. She drew up the walking-skirt an inch or two and pushed at a log with her foot.

"Of course it isn't as if you and I could ever quarrel, George," she said. "There, I'm burning your sister's slipper. I say we can't quarrel, because we're ever so far beyond that. Therefore we can talk quite plainly about anything on earth, or under it, or above it. So now tell me why I mustn't marry Derry."

I thought of the man upstairs, of the spirit-kettle on his

table, of why he must be alone when he woke in the morning.

"There are physical reasons, if there weren't any others."

"Of course. He'll get younger. He'll be sixteen. Well, I can be his mother then. But I shall have *been* his wife."

"For how long?"

She lifted her beautiful shoulders. "What does that matter? I said his wife. Does any bride on her wedding-day ask herself how long it's for? There have been widows who've never even taken breakfast with their husbands."

"But they married men like other men."

"Pooh! Tell that to any woman in love! They're all Derrys as long as it lasts, and he's Derry as long as it lasts."

"But his memory?"

"We don't know that anything's the matter with it. Really you're very hard to please, George. First you complain that he's got too much memory and he's writing what you call a wicked book with it. Now you seem afraid he hasn't enough to get married with. If he's happier without a memory at all, what's the odds?"

"But yourself?"

"Oh, I can look after myself—now! And anyway you needn't worry about *my* memory!"

Yet that was what I was worrying about. How gorgeously she had enriched her memories that very day I had seen for myself. Openly she exulted in her treasures. But what was to be the end of it all? By marriage did she mean one last wild lovely memory more and after that—nothing? If so, was ever degree so inconceivably prohibited? A dark-haired child in the wrong seat in a village church—a few odd hours in the country that it might have been a mercy to spare her—that day in my own house and grounds—to-morrow with whatever it might bring—perhaps another day or two unless he overtook another milestone before then . . . and then the relative and inevitable sequence: his bride, his elder sister, his mother, aunt, elderly adviser and friend, and so on to the close. This was the prospect she was deliberately embracing. Here she espied her joy. . . .

And should there be a child? . . .

She had sat down again. That appearance of a quarrel between two people who could never quarrel was at an end. I lifted the logs, arranged her shawl again, and then also sat down. Mrs Moxon brought in a tray, with hot milk and biscuits for her and whisky for myself. She set a small table between us. Julia's slender fingers played as it were a tune as she moved the too-hot glass from one position to another. Mrs Moxon gave a final glance round, wished us good night, and went out again. I mixed myself a peg, and then turned to Julia.

"I think you were going to tell me, when I interrupted you, what happened before I knew Derry," I said.

Little pistol-like cracks began to break from the green-oak logs I had moved. A thin pouring of amethyst streamed up the chimney-back, and the heart of the fire was intense pink and salmon. The glow from the ceiling made semi-transparent the rich shadows of the farther recesses of the room. It was true that as against my fifteen years she had known him for more than thirty. My own personal knowledge of his history was now on the point of failing. Only to her could I look for an anticipation of what might next be expected.

"Yes," she said musingly. "Anyway I'm prepared for it."

"What was it?"

"You don't know?"

"Only in a general way that at some time or other he must have travelled a good deal."

She nodded. "That's it. His *Wanderjahre*. He walked mostly—Italy, Germany, France, racketed about all over the place. Broke hearts wherever he went too I expect. It was then that he picked up his wonderful French."

"Then do you think that that phase is—falling due again?"

She shook her head slowly. How could she tell? "I only had occasional letters from him at that time. Usually

to smuggle him out some tobacco or see about a letter of credit or something. I had one from Siena, and one from Trieste, and another from Nîmes. . . . But," she added briskly, "if I married him of course I should go with him. That would solve everything."

"Would it!"

"I mean if his appearance changed much. You say yourself he can't stop in one place for long. He can't even take an ordinary job. And you seem to think that's a reason why I shouldn't marry him. But to my mind it's the very reason why I should. He shan't be left to tramp the world all alone, poor boy. I'm quite a good walker."

But for the shawl round her shoulders, the glass of hot milk and my sister's slippers, she seemed ready to start immediately.

"Julia, are you well off?" I suddenly asked her.

She smiled. "The sooner I'm paid for that portrait of you the better, George," she said.

"Because," I continued, "his royalties won't keep his boots soled, and as for that mad idea of fighting Carpentier——"

She made an indifferent gesture within the shawl and sipped her milk.

"And now," I pursued her, "I want you to notice how you've changed your mind this last half-hour or so. As you sit there now you haven't the least intention of becoming his secretary. In fact you're calmly planning how you can murder that book of his."

"How do you know that, George?"

"You are. Remember the flash-lamp. *He* wants to light up his time-scale from sixteen to forty or thereabouts. *You* want it like a burning-glass, all concentrated in one brilliant spot—yourself. In other words you're planning a mental assault on him."

She laughed delightedly. "Before committing a physical one? George, you shock me! I hope you're not going to lock me into my room!"

"Further than that. You don't intend to lose a moment

of time, because those Wanderjahre may be drawing very near."

Her mouth was prim. "It's a difficult position, George."

"Do you intend to ask him outright to marry you?"

"It's a very difficult position," she repeated demurely. "Suppose he accepted me one day and forgot all about it the next. I should have to propose to him daily, shouldn't I?"

"I don't think you need joke about it."

Her daring eyes positively fondled my face. She showed all her teeth in a wide smile.

"Why not?" she asked. "What else is there to do? You wouldn't have me take it seriously, would you? How can it be taken seriously?"

And she added, stretching her long hands to the fire, "Why, it would be the least serious marriage there ever was!"

### III

By breakfast-time the next morning I had taken a resolve. I had slept little for thinking of it. I intended, if I could, to make Derry talk about his book.

For while I abhorred the very idea of that book, there was one thing I abhorred more. This was the thought of the collapse of his memory. If anything happened to that the situation was horribly simple. A man who, from having had two memories, passes to not having one at all, is—gently but without any further pother—locked up. And had that been the end of it I don't think I should have had the heart to write Derry's tale.

He came down, shaven, radiant, hungry. I had heard his plunge into the lake three quarters of an hour before. Julia too was fresh as the dew, and ate heartily. So, over coffee and kidneys and bacon, with such offhandedness as I could assume, I asked him point-blank how his book was getting on.

A wave of thankfulness passed over me at his very first words.

"I say, George," he protested, "this is a holiday, you know. Must we talk shop? By sheer strength of will I've put it all on one side for a couple of days, and here you are trying to shove my nose back on to the grindstone again! Bit of a nigger-driver you are. . . . Well, just for the length of one pipe; after that shop's taboo for the rest of the day. What is it you want to know about it?"

"Oh, just how it's shaping."

He told me. His account of it as far as it had gone, his projection of the continuing portion, were perfectly lucid, reasoned, logical. He brought all his faculties to bear, was completely master of himself. His memory was as clear in both directions as it had been. I tested this by means of one or two questions that otherwise are of no importance here. All was well. My most dreaded fear was removed. Indeed it was I who, at the end of our pipe, had to change the subject.

One awkward, rather shamefaced explanation, however, he did make. This was both to Julia and to myself.

"I ought to say one thing while I'm about it," he said in a halting and embarrassed voice. "I got your note, Julia. I know what you mean. How you tumbled to it I don't know, and I needn't say it's an unspeakable comfort having the two of you. I'm not going to look a gift-horse like that in the mouth, so if you don't mind we won't talk about it. I suppose George told you, though?"

"Yes."

"Then that's all right. Of course he won't tell anybody else. If he'd asked me first I might have kicked a bit, but it's turned out all right, so that's all we need worry about. . . . Now what are we going to do to-day? Those trout at all muddy, George? Give me a mayfly and let's have a try at one of 'em——"

I got him a rod and warned him against the telephone-wire that has to cross one end of the pond. I left him and Julia mounting the cast on the verandah.

I went up to my study. I went there from a motive not unlike gratitude to God. An embodied ghost Derry might be to the rest of the world, but our little private triumvirate had still a normal basis. He understood the whole situation, and so to us was no ghost. Nor was even the prospect of his Wanderjahre now quite so intimidating. The terror would have been to think of him as an *ignis fatuus*, unconscious of himself, flitting hither and thither over the face of the Continent at large. *Cogito, ergo sum*. The distance of the lamp from the table's edge was apparently not an irrevocably fixed factor. "By sheer strength of will" he had been able to vary it. He *could* enjoy intensely and reason infallibly, if not at one and the same time, at any rate by turns. He *was* still capable of work and of play, and at the maximum of either.

How, then, did she stand with her wild scheme of marrying him?

I sat down at my table and worked it out thus :

While he was in his working mood he was inaccessible to her.

But while he was at play his accessibility was a raised power.

As his secretary she could not hope for more than a repetition of her former experience.

But as his playmate she met him on his return journey—he as he had been, but she far more *rusée* and resolved.

His work occupied by far the greater portion of his time.

Therefore his work stood in her way.

Therefore his work must be discouraged.

But I had encouraged him to speak of it.

I had done her a disservice.

But they were at play at this moment, setting up a fishing-rod on the verandah.

His Wanderjahre would presently be upon him again.

She knew this, and would lose no time.

I think that states it fairly.

And she had the whole day and the whole of to-morrow before her.

I began to wonder whether I had done wisely in asking them to stay after all.

But perhaps I was troubling myself unnecessarily about this moonshine-marriage after all. What about him? He at least would see the monstrous anomaly and would never allow it. He at any rate knew that if there was one place on earth where no woman must come it was into his room between evening and dawn. Things far too terrifying and precise happened during those hours. He knew this, and five minutes between him and myself would settle Julia's business once for all.

But again I saw in a flash where I was wrong. Five minutes between him and myself? It couldn't be done. Why? For the simple reason that, in order to talk to me at all on such a matter, he would have to be in his aware and "working" mood—the very mood in which he had always been inaccessible to her. My answer would be a stare from those steady grey-blue eyes. "Marry Julia!" he would exclaim. "My dear chap, what on earth are you talking about? If I'd ever dreamed of marrying Julia shouldn't I have done it years ago? It's the very last thing in the world I ever thought of!" That would be his reply to me. I should be warning him against a contingency he had never for a moment entertained.

And yet—for even that was not the end of it—it was perfectly possible that with that word "Preposterous!" still on his lips he might go straight to her, hand her into the punt, once more alter his focus of intelligence, and be under her spell again before they were half-way across the pond. . . .

Suddenly I heard his call below: "Quick, Julia, the net—I've got him on!" I stepped out on to the balcony to watch. It was one of the three-pounders, making a good fight for it. But he had little chance against my green-heart in Derry's hand. Three minutes settled it. There



he lay on the bank, with Derry and Julia bending over him. I think she thought him a lucky fish to have been caught by Derry. I descended and joined them.

"Going to try for another?" I asked him. But already he was taking down the rod.

"No, we thought of doing a bit of crosscut sawing for a change."

"Not the incinerator?" I hinted with a glance at Julia.

"Ah yes, I'd forgotten about the incinerator," he exclaimed. "Which shall we do, Julia? Walk on to the blacksmith's or do the sawing? The sawing I think; it'll take some time to cut the rods, and we can send a lad with the sizes and fetch them after lunch. Do the boys come to bathe on Saturdays, George?"

"They do," I said with another glance at her.

I saw the little mutinous dip of the corners of her mouth.

I am not going to take you in detail through the whole of that day. For half the afternoon they disappeared; they had gone for a walk in the neighbouring woods; but they were back in time for the bathing-parade. Again Derry swam, with the boys, while I lay with Julia in the punt.

We occupied opposite ends of it, and hardly spoke. The commotion made by the swimmers was almost spent by the time it reached our end of the pond, and we moved almost imperceptibly under the oaks, with now a soft touch on the bank, then a little way out, and then the glide to the bank again. A sort of amicable hostility seemed to have settled between us. It seemed to be understood that she would do what she would do, and I should prevent it if I could. I could see the soles of her walking-shoes and her worsted-clad ankles as I lay, and I mused on the contrasts in her. She was ready to be off with him anywhere, anyhow; but the evening before she had been glad of a glass of hot milk and a fire to warm her hands at. She might, as she said, be a good walker, but she had drawn my sister's shawl closely enough about her shoulders to keep out the night air. She was a young forty, yet somehow hardly young enough to traipse houseless after him

wherever his whim might lead him. She was not altogether irresponsible, and yet she contemplated "the least serious marriage there ever was."

The punt rocked as she suddenly sat half up. "Are you asleep, George?"

"No."

"I nearly was. I can't imagine why you ever come to London when you've a place like this to bask in. How do you manage to get any work done?"

"I can't say I am doing a great deal at present."

"Now that's the first inhospitable thing you've said. Which is your study—the end room there?" She glanced up at the balcony.

"Yes."

"Don't you ever sleep out?"

"No. My room's at the back, and it's two wide-open windows."

"I love the ramblers up the pillars! May I have some to take back?"

"*Mais naturellement.*"

"Ah, but you can't stay that like Derry, George——"

"I can't do anything like Derry. On the whole I'm not sure that I want to."

"You don't believe that sometimes one single hour may be worth all the rest of life put together?"

"I suppose I'm the other kind of man."

"Ah well!" She stretched herself luxuriously. "I used to think as you do. But I've learned a lot since then. An awful lot."

"'Awful's' perhaps the word."

"But lovely. Anyway who cares? What does it matter? What does anything matter? (Oh, look at his dive!) Nothing matters, George—nothing. I dare you to say it does."

"It might be difficult to run the world on those lines."

"Oh, I don't know. It's in a pretty ghastly muddle as it is. Do you know, I've made a discovery about that, George."

"Really?"

"It's this: That we make the mistake of regarding the world as full of rational people, with perhaps a few particularly stupid ones here and there. Now if you'll only regard it as full of perfect zenies, with just once in a while a reasonable being among them, that would explain everything."

"You'd better go to sleep again, Julia."

"But it is so. I see it, oh so clearly! And you don't worry about anything then—what anybody thinks or says or does or anything. You just take the funny old peepshow as it is. That's the way to live."

"On an endless walking-tour?"

"Why not, if you're in jolly places all the time?"

"Siena? Nimes? Trieste?"

"Literal George! . . . But really, nothing matters. Everything except the present moment is meant to be forgotten. It's the only one you live in. In the past you're dead and in the future you aren't born yet—except him. . . . George——"

"Hm?"

"Girls nowadays *do* have an awfully easy time! . . . You've only got to look at their clothes. We dressed down to our toes and up to our ears, and that meant we had to take a good deal of trouble about things. We had to make a little go a long way, so to speak—talk, and smile, and be amusing, and think what we said. If we didn't we were soon left out in the cold. But girls nowadays simply powder their shoulder blades and dress to their knees more or less, and that's all. Lots of 'em never open their mouths except to eat. They don't *do* anything; they get there by *undoing* something. . . . But how boring for you, George. What does it matter as long as you do get there?"

"I hope you'll think twice before you commit a very great folly," I said.

She laughed. "No, no. I've finished thinking. It was one of my mother's maxims: 'Take care of your health and don't ever give way to serious thinking.' Don't you think it's rather good?"

"I agree as far as your health's concerned."

"Oh, the other too. She was a wise woman. I've only lately begun to realise how wise. . . . Ah, they're going in. Come along."

She stood up in the punt to see whether Derry appeared on the balcony on his way to dress.

At teatime I had a caller, a gentle old friend and neighbour of mine, Mrs Truscott. I saw her old-fashioned victoria standing in the drive as we reached the terrace. Derry was charming to the old lady; Julia—also charming, but with some subtle difference that I cannot explain. After tea Derry and Julia strolled off to see whether the rods had come from the blacksmith's yet, but they stopped to examine the victoria on the way. Mrs Truscott turned to me.

"What an exceedingly handsome man! But surely she's a good deal older than he?"

"Why do you couple them like that?" I asked.

"Aren't they engaged?"

"No."

She smiled. "Not yet?"

"Nor likely to be," I risked.

She shook her head, so that her grey curls trembled about her cheeks.

"Ah, you bachelors, Sir George! All sorts of things happen under your noses that you don't see!"

"I don't think anything's happening here. They've simply been friends since they were boy and girl together."

"That's a handicap, I admit," she replied. "Perhaps the worst a woman has to put up with. But occasionally things happen in spite of it."

"I really think you're mistaken this time, Mrs Truscott."

"Well, well, well, well. . . . And are you writing us another of your charming books?"

It passed at that, but it left me with an uneasy feeling. These old ladies are so very acute.

Nothing remarkable happened at dinner, except a curious little covert duel between Julia and myself when I

once more tried to draw out Derry to talk about his book. I am afraid that she won and I failed. Good-temperedly but flatly he refused to discuss it; he wanted to look at my Hogarths instead. So I drew the large folio-stand up in front of the drawing-room fire, arranged the lights and we turned over the prints. He seemed very much less drowsy; indeed it was half-past nine before he spoke of going to bed; and as in the country that is not an unreasonably early hour, and since moreover Julia had sat up late the night before, I was not surprised when she also said that she would retire early. He went first, but she was not long after him. I was therefore left either to sit over my fire alone, or to follow them, which ever I liked best.

I went my nightly round, of window-fastenings and so forth; for although Mrs Moxon has always been round before me, it is my house, and there would be small satisfaction in scolding her were anything to happen. As a matter of fact I had that night to reopen the side door, for it had occurred to me that the driver of Mrs Truscott's victoria, who was almost as old as herself, had the bad habit of leaving the drive-gate open. Accordingly I walked up the drive, saw that the gate was properly fastened, and then stood for a moment enjoying the cool air.

It was a full and late-rising moon, and only the faintest hint of yellow yet lighted the trunks of the plantation behind the house. The overflow from the lake, which I never heard in the daytime, sounded loudly. The evening star had set; the others were exceedingly tiny, pale and remote; in another hour or so they would be almost extinguished in the moon's effulgence. A glow-worm burned stilly, lighting up the whole leaf as a ship's sidelight lights up its painted box. Through a gleam from the house a bat flickered. I stood for several minutes; then I turned, went in, locked up, and ascended to my bedroom.

This room, I should explain, is at the back of the house and does not overlook the pond. This is in some ways a drawback, but it has its advantages. By foregoing the amenity of sleeping in one of the rooms with the pleasantest

view I was able to have a practically self-contained suite all to myself—study in front, and dressing-room, bathroom and bedroom all communicating. My books alone run into all three rooms, and are thus kept together; and the rest of the upper floor is left for my guests and servants. Derry's room was the one next to my study. Julia's, like my own, was at the back. I had put her there partly because of the second bathroom, and partly because Mrs Moxon would be within call had she need of anything.

All was quiet as I entered the room. I switched on my bedside light, undressed, and got into bed. But I was not very sleepy, so I got out again, reached down a book at random, punched my pillow into position and began to read.

I was not very lucky in my book, however, and my attention wandered. From wondering what was wrong with my author I passed away from him altogether, and presently found myself spinning, as it were, fantasias on life in human terms. And as I continued to do this these fantasias began to accrete more and more about the figure of Derwent Rose.

What a history had unfolded since that afternoon when I had found him in the Lyonesse Club, gazing at his image in the glass of a framed print on the wall! Hitherto I had contemplated that unfolding only a portion at a time. I had typified him as it were in terms of his books, had seen the man who had written *The Hands of Esau* give way to him who had written *An Ape in Hell*, and this one in turn to the author of *The Vicarage of Bray*. I had taken him phase by phase; I was not yet sure of a single unit of the repeating-pattern of his backward life. But these books were not merely his three principal books. They were his only books of any importance. All prior to the *Vicarage* had been experimental, fragmentary, partial—as indeed all he had ever done was fragmentary and partial by the side of the huge and desperate work he now contemplated. Therefore we were at the end of measurement by books. The rest was in Julia Oliphant's possession. She was now his sole authentic companion, and soon she would have shouldered even

me completely out of his life, and would go forward—backward—with him alone.

My thoughts passed to her. What a history for her too since that afternoon when I had taken her hands in mine, had asked her a question, and had had her matter-of-fact reply, "Of course; all my life; but it never made any difference to him." Now it was to make a difference to him. Though he presently eluded her never so swiftly down the slippery years, she had come to the conclusion that it was worth it. And, for a few weeks, a few hours yet, I had to admit that they were not ill-matched. Mrs Truscott had thought that she was older than he, but had none the less assumed them to be lovers. He, of course, had sunk into a vast of sleep an hour ago, but I wondered whether she was at that moment lying awake, scheming, contriving, making sure. . . .

Then, tired of thought, I switched off my lamp and closed my eyes.

The rather secluded situation of my house has its reaction on the quality of my sleep. I don't mean that I don't ordinarily sleep perfectly soundly and naturally, but the routine of locking up for the night sets, as it were, a timepiece in my head. The running of the lake, the night-sounds of animals and birds, the creaking of a bough, the motion of a window-blind in the wind—these are every-night sounds to which I have grown accustomed; but any unusual sound will bring me wide awake in a moment. Robbery in the neighbourhood is not entirely unknown.

I had slept for perhaps a couple of hours when I was thus brought suddenly awake.

The moon was high over the plantation; it slanted whitely across my window-sash, cut into relief the folds of the case-ment curtains. Outside the night creatures would be at play or about their nocturnal employments. But it was no owl nor rabbit that I had heard. It had been the light crackling of something under a foot. I sat up, still, listening.

I heard nothing further, and after a minute noiselessly uncovered myself and slipped out of bed. All the doors

of my little suite stood open, so that I had no handle to turn as I tiptoed from my bedroom into the dressing-room. Thence I could look through the study to the balcony beyond. The night was palely brilliant; my eyes could penetrate into the detailed depths of the oaks across the pond; I could see the pebbles on the path, the shadow of a chimney-stack over the bathing-stage. The balcony itself, however, was a blackness. On that side of the house a marauder could easily hide.

I went back to the dressing-room, took down a dark-coloured gown, put it on, and returned through the study. If anybody was lurking about I wished to be inconspicuous. I reached my writing-table and was about to step outside when again I heard the sound. It came, not from below, but from the balcony itself.

My study doors are so arranged that I can either hook them half back, at an angle of forty-five, or entirely so, flush against the walls. That night they stood at their fullest width, so that, if anybody was on the verandah, I had not to risk discovering myself as it were obliquely. I advanced to the hinged edge and peered cautiously forth.

Derry was not asleep. He was moving irresolutely, now a few steps this way, now a few steps that, at the farther end of the balcony, and the noise I had heard had been the cracking of a fir-cone or fragment of bark under his feet. His hair was tumbled, he had put on his old tweed jacket, but the pyjama-suit I had lent him was small for him, and his bare ankles showed above his heelless slippers. There was no light in his room, and I suddenly remembered that that evening he had not shown his usual anxiety to be off early upstairs.

After those immensities of sleep, was he now suffering from insomnia?

I was about to step out to him when something within me, I really can't tell you what, drew me swiftly back again. The room past Derry's, opposite which he now stood, was unoccupied, and its windows were closed except for the little doors in the upper panes. But somebody was undoing a



fastening. I had seen the turn of Derry's head towards me, and had withdrawn my own head only just in time. The sound of unfastening continued.

I think already I knew what I was going to see. By crossing the corridor Julia could enter that unoccupied room, pass through it, and gain the balcony. Indeed (I struggled to persuade myself) were she sleepless and in need of air there was no reason why she shouldn't. But I knew that I mocked myself. I knew that not sleeplessness had brought her out. Almost, I thought, they must hear the thumping of my heart. I wondered whether I dared look again.

I dared not—yet I had to—

She had cast over her the Burberry she had brought out for the single day. She left the bedroom door open behind her and stood with her pale hand on the edge of it, not advancing. Slowly his head lifted. His eyes met hers. I think I could have stepped bodily out and he would not have seen me for the look he gave her. It was hard, fixed, tranced. Still she did not move. All her life she had waited for him; it was proper now that he should come to her.

Very slowly he lifted his hands—

Already I had turned away.

For I had heard the little flutter of her garments, the rush and catch of her breath—

Grim King of the Ghosts!

She was in his arms.

#### IV

The next morning I did not hear his plunge into the lake. This was not because I was not back in my own house in time.

For I had not remained in it. I had dressed, had crept softly downstairs, and had let myself out, easing the catch of the side-door behind me. I had walked to Hindhead, and from the edge of the Punch Bowl had seen the night end

and the day begin. I had watched the cloudlets kindle like plumes of the wings of cherubim, ineffable, indifferent, anguishing in that the eye and heart ached and fainted for more than they could endure, gazed and yet saw not because of their own overbrimming. I had turned away, weary of the heavenly thing, yet had returned with tears for more of it. I had cast myself down with my face hidden in the wet earth. I had tried not to think or feel. Had it been possible I would have been, not a few miles, but a few worlds away. And in sober fact I am not sure that I was not worlds away. In the thing that had happened time, distance, had no meaning. Nothing so mystic in its very nature can be merely *a little* in error; once it is not right, it is wrong with an unimaginable totality. Ordinary measurement is annihilated; in the very instant of identity the last conceivable differences are wrapped up together as in the vital element of a seed. I am sorry I cannot make this plainer. You either see what had happened or you don't. It beat and bludgeoned my spirit as I lay there, sometimes quivering, sometimes still, while the sun had risen over the Devil's Punch Bowl.

On my return to the house Mrs Moxon met me. She is an efficient creature, but a little given to impressionistic fancies, and there was perplexity in her face as I entered by the way I had left—the side door.

"The gentleman and lady don't seem to be having any breakfast, sir," she said.

"Why not?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you, sir. Mr—Mr Rose asked where you were, and then said perhaps I'd better keep breakfast back."

"Where are Mr Rose and Miss Oliphant now?"

"They went off that way, sir." She nodded in the direction of the kitchen-garden.

"Then I'll see about it. Have breakfast ready in ten minutes, please."

The kitchen-garden is not very large, but it is a straggling sort of place, being, in fact, the oddments of ground left over when the tennis-court was made. I looked for my

guests among the dewy canes, but did not see them; they were not behind the sweet-pea hedge that made my lungs open of themselves to receive its fragrance. But they had been there, for I saw that the roller on the court had been moved. Its barrel was wet all round with dew, and the patch of grass where it had stood during the night was dry.

Then, just as I was on the point of calling their names, they appeared from behind the tall artichoke brake.

I spoke first, ignoring what Mrs Moxon had told me.

"Good morning," I called. "Breakfast is just ready. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Come along."

It was Derry who answered, advancing across the court towards me.

"Ah, there you are. I've been looking for you. I wanted to thank you and say good-bye. I'm afraid I've got to be pushing along."

I acted my part as well as I could. "Pushing along! What are you talking about? What train are you going by? This is Sunday. Come along in to breakfast."

"Oh, I'd a cup of tea and a biscuit in my room, thanks," he said hesitatingly. "I know it's springing it on you rather suddenly, George, but I really must be getting along."

"What's all this about? Your book?" I demanded.

"Yes, the book. Yes, the book, George."

"But I tell you it's Sunday. There the twelve-forty-six and the four-fifty. You've missed the eight-fifty-five."

"I thought of walking," he said.

"All the way to London? That would take you two days. So it isn't your book after all."

"Oh, I meant part of the way," he evaded, fidgeting. "Guildford or Weybridge or somewhere."

"And is Julia going to walk to Guildford or Weybridge too? Don't be absurd. Come along to breakfast."

Reluctantly he turned his face towards the house.

I say I acted as well as I could; but it was acting. I had to act because I was afraid to face the reality. His haste to be off seemed to make that reality a twofold possibility. In

the highly peculiar circumstances it was not for me, his host, to inquire whether he scrupled to breakfast or sit down in my house; but it was for me, technically still his friend, to wonder why he had tried to put me off with some tale about wanting to get on with his book and, in his eagerness to be gone, proposed to walk to London. It might have been decency and delicacy. On the other hand, he now experienced everything with the greatest intensity, and this sudden and imperious urge to walk might have been the first faint thrilling of that communicating nerve that, traced back, led to his Wanderjahre.

At Julia I had not yet dared to look.

I made him eat whether he wished it or not; oh, I was not above using my advantage. For he was entirely unaware that the cracking of a fir-cone under his foot had brought me out of my bed and to the door of my study. It was because he supposed me to have been soundly asleep all night that I was able to compel him to swallow his punctiliousness at the same time that he swallowed his trout, coffee and marmalade. If either or all of them stuck in his throat there was no remedy for that. . . . At least so at first I thought. But as breakfast proceeded, I began to be strangely aware of my complete helplessness. Much as I might wish it, I could not wash my hands of him. Once more, the choice was not mine, but his.

For what could I do with him? Nothing—nothing at all. I was bound hand and foot. You cannot turn a two-memorial man out of your house as you can another. You don't get rid of him if you do. He has his own—ubiquity. There is only one of him, and you never know where he isn't. It was not now a question of whether he should marry Julia Oliphant, but whether he was to be suffered to vanish, to be swallowed up in the world of men, a drop in the human ocean that did not merge but still remained a drop, a grain on humanity's shore yet numbered too, an anomaly, a contradiction in nature, a ghost in the flesh, a man among ghosts. For if he was a ghost to us we must be ghosts to him. And ghost does not bring ghost to book for reasons of the flesh.

No, he was still Derry, on whom this enormous destiny had alighted. He was not to be judged.

Nevertheless he must settle his soul's affairs and eat his breakfast like anybody else.

We got through that meal somehow. Julia talked to Derry, and I suppose I also was included, but I have no memory of what it was all about. One vivid little incident, however, I do remember. I learned why the heavy roller on the tennis court had been moved. She had asked Derry whether he could lift it, and for answer he had picked it up and held it above his head, as once he had held her sewing-machine. So she had gloried in him. . . . But of the rest of the conversation I remember nothing. Breakfast over, I excused myself and left them at the table together. It had occurred to me that I was still as I had returned from the Devil's Punch Bowl, and that I had neither shaved nor bathed.

But on my way to my room Mrs Moxon again met me. She was replacing flowers, and she carried a pail of withered ones in her hand.

"I beg pardon, sir, but may I ask if you got up in the night?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Why?"

"Only that I fancied I heard somebody moving about," she said.

"Yes. I went into Mr Rose's room. Then I went out for a walk. I'm not sleeping very well, Mrs Moxon. To-night I shall take a draught."

She knows my tone. I hope she was satisfied. I passed on to my dressing-room.

Three quarters of an hour later I came down again. I found Julia at one of the drawing-room windows, alone and gazing out over the pond. She started at the sound of my voice behind her.

"Where's Derry?" I had asked.

"Over there by the punt," she replied.

I had not noticed him as he had stooped behind the little shelter to untie it.

"Is he leaving to-day?"

"I don't know."

"Are you trying to keep him?"

She had turned her back on me again and was once more looking out of the window. "Of course I'm trying to keep him—so far as I may in somebody else's house."

"Oh. . . . Why 'of course?'"

"Of course it's of course. Do you think I'm going to take my eyes off him for a single moment? You heard what he said before breakfast."

"About walking to London as the quickest way of getting back to that book of his?"

She did not answer. Derry had moved, and her eyes had instantly moved with him.

"Why is he putting out by himself? Why aren't you with him?" I asked.

"Oh—as long as I know where he is——"

"Didn't he ask you to join him?"

"No."

"The first time for two days?"

No reply.

"I wonder why he didn't ask you?"

"I wonder," she repeated.

"Have you no idea?"

With that she suddenly confronted me. She stood with her hands on either side of the window-frame, dark against the morning light. She looked straight into my eyes.

"Isn't this rather a catechism, George?" she said. "Your tone too. I want you to tell me something. It's this: Are these *really* the questions you're wanting to ask me?"

She said it with the proudest calm; but whatever it was that existed between us made me for some moments longer as calm as herself.

"I do want to know those things. Otherwise I shouldn't have asked you."

"Oh, I'm afraid I said it badly. That's not what I meant. I mean are those the *only* questions you want to ask me?"

The moment she said it I was much less certain that they

were not. Her next words plunged me still deeper into doubt. She spoke as it were direct from the heart of some uttermost complexity.

"What *is* the relation between you and me, George?" she demanded.

I considered, my eyes downcast. I felt hers steadily on my face all the time. I spoke in a low voice.

"I'm beginning to know less than ever."

"You'd hardly call it ordinary, would you—conventional and so on?"

"That's quite the last word I should use."

"It's not ordinary because of an extraordinary element that's at the very root of it. You know what that is; it's"—her eyes went towards the punt—"it's all him. He's got us all on the run. Give him his head and he could have the whole world on the run. There's no reason about it; as many people as knew about him would simply be bewitched. So I've taken it for granted that we don't quite come under everyday rules. We have to break and make rules as we go along. . . . About those questions. They really *are* all that you want to know—just what he'll do next and so on?" she challenged me.

I think I should have broken in on the spot with a "Yes—I want to know *nothing* else—nothing at all!" But she gave me no time. Her eyes called my own downcast ones peremptorily up from the floor.

"Because," she said, with the utmost distinctness in the shaping of each syllable, "I notice that since breakfast you've shaved, George. You've also changed your clothes. One does not usually change one's clothes immediately after breakfast. I suppose Mrs Moxon is brushing the others. They needed brushing. They had bits of dried grass and heather on them. . . . George—George dear—thank you——"

I spoke in little more than a whisper. "For—going out?"

"Oh no. For only thinking of it—for only thinking of it. But you would think of it; I always knew you'd be like that. . . . Now ask me anything you like. *Anything* you like.

Only don't ask Derry. It made"—for an instant only there was the slightest tremor in her voice—"it made no difference to him."

What, as she had said, was our relation? Had he "got us going"? Had he subdued all our standards to his own standardlessness? Had he withdrawn some linchpin of ordinary conduct from the wheel on which the whole world revolves? I didn't know. I don't know now. The more I think of it the less I know. I only know what I did. Her affairs were her affairs, and I have ado enough to look after my own. I took one of her cool hands in mine, bowed as low over it as if she had been a queen, and kissed it.

Her other hand rested lightly for a moment on my head as I did so.

"And now," she resumed in her ordinary tones, "about him."

He was sitting alone in the punt, some forty yards away, gazing straight before him. He had ceased to paddle, the water had ceased to drip from his resting blade. It accentuated his isolation that for two whole days he had hardly left her side. Restlessness and impatience plainly possessed him. He was straining to be off. It would not have surprised me to see him suddenly thrust the paddle in, swirl across the lake, tie up the punt, walk straight up to me, hold out his hand, and say, "George, old man, it's no good—I've got to go this moment." I turned to Julia.

"If he leaves shall you go with him?" I asked.

"Leaves here? This house? To-day?"

"I didn't mean that."

"You mean if he buckles on his knapsack again?"

"If that's the next stage."

"I'm afraid to think."

"Then you *do* think he might just—go off?"

She sighed a little. "I suppose it has to be faced."

"And in that case would you go with him?"

She started nervously. He had put in the paddle. But he only gave a couple of strokes, and withdrew it again. Her voice was low.



"I would, of course. To the end of the world. But that's the whole point. He never wanted me. He doesn't want me now. He won't want me then."

I saw—only too plainly. Naturally he would not want her. It was the very essence of his wandering that he should be unhampered and alone. That which she now had she had; but it seemed to me that it was all she would ever have. She had thrown, and—won? Lost? Which? That was for her to say. Had she remained content as she was she might have kept him on the original terms in perpetuity; but it looked as if in precipitating the event she had encompassed her own defeat. Her eyes were now on him as if they would never see him again.

"Shall we go across to him?" I said.

She shook her head. "Don't worry him. There's no stopping it. He's bound to go. There, I didn't want to say it, but it's better to face it. He's fighting with the Wanderlust now. And if he goes it isn't the end. There are stages beyond that, and there's no stopping them either. He'll come back in the end."

"Then you'll let him go?"

"He shall do whatever he wishes. It mayn't be for long."

"How many Wanderjahre had he?"

"Two—three—I don't quite remember. But that may not mean more than a week or a fortnight really."

"And—he'll come back?"

"He'll come back, or we can go to him. Probably he won't be able to get very far. Anyway nothing on earth can stop it, so there's no more to be said."

I looked at her fixedly, earnestly. "But there is more to be said. What about yourself?" I said quietly.

For a moment her eyes left that man in the punt who fidgeted to feel the stick in his hand again, the pack on his back and the hard road under his feet. They smiled dimly into mine.

"Oh, I'm a painter. There'll be that portrait of yours to start presently, George."

And back went the eyes to the motionless figure in the punt.

## V

Derry stayed to lunch without further pressing. He had made his book his excuse; that brushed aside, he had no choice but to stay or give his reason for not staying. So, as a man who is starting on a walking-tour of indefinite duration can hardly boggle at an hour or two sooner or later in the starting, and as, moreover, having brought Julia, he must in ordinary politeness take her back again, he stayed.

But lunch was nearly as extraordinary as breakfast had been. Once more he tried to urge his book, and again failed. And I remembered how formerly, in Cambridge Circus, his very thought and essence had been modified in my presence, awaiting only sleep to put the visible and physical seal upon it. It needed only half an eye to see that he no longer had the least interest in that book. The more he urged it, the more plainly it became a thing of the past. Vivaciously, yet as if repeating them from memory, he said things he had said twice and thrice before; echoes, mere echoes. . . . And then suddenly he ceased to talk about his book. He wanted a change, he said; wanted to get away somewhere; and this rang instantly true. I fancied he even became a little cunning. "Do you know, George, I've never in my life been in Ireland?" he said. "Only an hour or two away, and I've never been! Lord, how we do sit still in one place! I feel positively ashamed. We settle down—get *sitzfleisch*—heavens, I do want a change!" . . . And somehow I knew that he was dragging in Ireland as a red-herring. He had no intention of going there. That was purely for our benefit. He not only wanted to go away alone, but he did not wish to have his whereabouts known. Only a few hours before he had made much of Julia and myself, as his only rest and comfort in that wavering ebb of his life; now he no longer did not need, but very definitely did not want companionship. And he threw dust in our eyes. Yes, just a little cunning. I made a note of it.

I have said that the afternoon train to town was at four-forty. There was not another till seven-eighteen, reaching

Waterloo at eight-forty-one. There was little doubt which of the two he would choose. As we all three took a stroll backwards and forwards after lunch he turned to Julia.

"Will the four-forty suit you all right?" he asked.

She only nodded.

"Right. And I say: would you mind if when we got to town I put you on your bus at Waterloo and left you? There's a little job I must do."

"Very well, Derry," she said.

"And now, George, if you could spare me just a moment——," this time he turned to me.

Julia walked rather quickly away.

The "little job" of which he had spoken was this:

He wanted me—quite at my own convenience, of course, and whenever I next happened to be in town—to arrange for the sale of his things at Cambridge Circus. To attend to this himself might be to ask for trouble. So I was to sell everything for what it would fetch and remit the money to him.

"Where?" I asked him. ("Ireland?" I thought.)

"I shall have to let you know that later," he replied. "I want to sell the lot and pay all up there; chairs and curtains are no good to a man like me. I don't suppose I shall ever want 'em again. I shall have to settle up with Trenchard too, and money's as well in your pocket as anywhere else."

"Will you have some now to be going on with?"

"No, that's quite all right. I have all I want for the present, if you wouldn't mind doing this other for me. Thanks, old fellow."

"Is it to Cambridge Circus that you're going to-night when you leave Julia?" I asked.

"Yes. There are one or two small things I want, and also a few things I think I'd better destroy."

"Couldn't you," I said slowly and quite deliberately, "have taken her home and seen about your things to-morrow?"

I felt the beginning of his perturbation. "It's so dashed awkward, George," he stammered. "I don't want to go in the daytime."

"Couldn't you go to-morrow night and still take her home?"

Again he muttered, his eyes on the ground. "Why waste a day?"

"If, as you say, you want a change—supposing you were to go off somewhere for a bit—wouldn't you like somebody with you?"

"No, George," he answered curtly.

"You are going away?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Immediately?"

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"I don't know yet."

"Would you let me come with you?"

"No."

"Would you, if it were possible, take Julia?"

"No."

"Might both of us come with you together?"

"No." And, raising his voice, "No, I tell you, no!" he said.

We had stopped by a rather shabby-looking thicket of rugosa roses near the diving-stage. The pink-flowered hedge hid us from the house. I spoke quietly, not to give my own agitation too much head.

"Derry," I said, "you remember what you showed me with that flashlight that night in your rooms?"

With marked reluctance he answered, "Yes I do."

"I've been thinking about that. I've been thinking a lot about it. Of course it makes a considerable difference how far away you hold the lamp."

"A hell of a difference," he muttered.

"Do you always hold it at the same distance?"

His whole mind seemed to wriggle. "I haven't, if you must know. But why drag all this up again? I offered to tell you before but you wouldn't listen."

"I hadn't the reason then that I have now. Do you—move it about deliberately?"

"I have to some extent. I told you that. I did by an effort of will when I came here for a day's rest."

"A day's rest? . . . You're not going back to that book. You know that better than I do. That book's all past and done with. Something's happened since."

I saw him turn pale. "What do you mean?" he asked almost inaudibly.

"You came here on Friday midday. I've watched you carefully ever since. Let's—well, let's stick to terms of the flash-lamp. Except for a quarter of an hour or so at breakfast yesterday morning, when you talked about your book, you've had that lamp steadily rather close to the edge of the table. Isn't that so?"

"I tell you a holiday's a holiday," he said faintly.

"Let me go on. I want to know how close that lamp has been. The closer you hold it the more ecstatically you experience, you know. Very well. Now has there been a moment since yesterday when . . . *you've held it as close as you could get it?*"

I was in time to catch him as he swayed. He clutched at my shoulder.

"George——"

"Steady—but tell me——"

"George—I've been trying to remember——"

"What! Good God! You don't remem—*so close that you don't remember?*"

"I honestly—but no, that isn't true—I seem to remember something—let me think, let me think. . . . What time did I go to bed last night?"

"Later than usual. Not till half-past nine."

"What was I doing? Tell me what I was doing. I was looking at pictures or something, wasn't I?"

"You were looking at the Hogarth prints."

"Yes, yes, that's right. . . . I didn't fall asleep, did I?"

"No, you didn't."

He muttered thickly. Outrageous, extravagant, beyond reason as it was, his sincerity could not be doubted. "It made no difference to him," Julia had said; but that her

words should be taken *au pied de la lettre* like that! . . . He continued to mutter.

"I do remember something—I do remember—at least I did this morning—I thought I did—but it went. Why didn't I come into breakfast? *Why* was I going away without any breakfast? *Why* wouldn't I have breakfast, George? I'm sure there was a reason, but I can't for the life of me remember." Then he began to talk rapidly. "That lamp—very close, you say—touching—something all instantaneous and burning—one intense brilliant spot—no before or after—all isolated by itself—but I'll swear I didn't fake the lamp that time! By all that's sacred I swear it, George! Something happened in the night that had nothing to do with me at all! It all happens in the night. Why"—he flung out his arms in a perfectly amazing appeal—"if I'd moved the light at all it would have been farther away! I *wanted* to do that book! I thought about nothing else from the moment I went upstairs! I ached to be at it—wished this wasted week-end was over—I saw it all again perfectly clearly, beautifully clearly! I'd got out of bed. And then . . . everything went out. It was exactly as if somebody'd taken that torch out of my hand, somebody with a stronger will than mine, and concentrated it—in the very moment when I saw that book practically written—one bright blazing bull's-eye——"

There was a little bench about four yards away. I think I needed its support more than he. Together we reached it and sat down. He turned the beautiful grey-blue eyes on me.

"George," he said more quietly, "something happened. I know it did."

I made no reply.

"Something happened. Something's been done to me. Somebody's been taking a hand in my life. At breakfast-time I almost knew what it was. Do *you* know what it was?"

There was only one possible answer to this. I made it, in a broken voice.

"No, old man, I don't."

"Except of course that I've slipped back again."

"Except that, I suppose."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow, and, much as I hated that insolent vainglorious book of his, the gesture with which he wiped it away went strangely to my heart.

"Then what's that make the year now? 1903 or 4 I suppose; all blind guessing though; how can you tell your age to a year or two simply by how you feel? . . . But that would be about it. I was in the Adriatic in 1903; Venice, and across to Genoa and Marseilles. I'd been in Marseilles a few years before and thought I'd like another look at it. Gay place. There was a little café on the Vieux Port with a little stage where a woman used to dance. Andalusian; very dark-eyed; pretty sort of wild animal. She had a little sloping mirror at the top of the stage so she could see who was in front when she was behind. Wicked show; I wasn't having any; knives come out too easily there. But of course she'd gone when I went again in 1904."

I made one more appeal. "Derry, can't you stay here a little longer?"

But it had now resumed its possession of him. He was almost cheerful again.

"Sorry, George. It's good of you to ask me, but it's quite impossible. Glad Julia was able to take a run down with me: she's a rattling good sort. I feel rather beastly about shaking her at Waterloo, but I really must get up to Cambridge Circus to-night. And if you'll see about selling those things, George—any time will do—I've got nearly a hundred pounds, so there's really no hurry—I'll let you know where to send the money to—"

I drove them to the station. As the car turned out of the drive Julia's eyes took a last look at my balconied house. His spirits were now high; he was on the eve of a holiday. They got into an empty third-class carriage.

"Well, thanks most awfully, George," he said.

We waved hands.

Both their heads were framed in the window as the train glided out of the station.

That night I once more roamed restlessly from room to room of my house. The place seemed extraordinarily and insistently empty, and I could not have told you whether I was glad or sorry for it. For this thing was getting altogether too much for me. Remember that I am merely a commercially successful English novelist, not a person accustomed to the contemplation of the mysteries of life and death in terms of electric torches and bamboo tables. Also a man of my years does not spend a night at the Devil's Punch Bowl without knowing something about it afterwards. In this connection, going into my dressing-room, I found that after all my suit of clothes had not been brushed. I summoned Mrs Moxon and told her to take them away. She stiffened a little, and some part of her clothing creaked.

"It's made a good deal of extra work for the week-end," she reminded me.

"I'm sorry for that, but you were consulted beforehand," I said.

"It was more than I reckoned for," she announced with dignity.

A little of this was enough.

"Very well, Mrs Moxon. Take the clothes away, please, and let me have them to-morrow. By the way, I shall be going up to town by the midday train."

"In that case, sir," she said, "if you're seeing Mr Rose perhaps you'd give him this. I suppose it's his. I found it in his room."

She put into my hand a small book covered with shiny black cloth. I opened it to see what it was.

A single glance told me. It was Derwent Rose's diary.



**PART V**  
**THE PIVOT**



## I

“George, you haven’t brought your Beautiful Bear round to see me yet,” said Madge Aird. And I jumped a little as she added, “By the way, does he happen to have a brother?”

“No. At least I never heard of one. Why?”

“I wondered. I’ve seen somebody most remarkably like him, only younger. In this neighbourhood too. I thought Nature made him and then lost the recipe, or whatever the saying is.”

I assumed a lightness I hardly felt. “Did you ‘fall for’ this other paragon as you did for Mr Rose?”

She laughed. “Oh, I don’t know. I dare say beauty of that sort would be ill to live with. Better a dinner of herbs all to yourself than a stalled ox every woman you knew would be running after. Or words to that effect. So you and Alec needn’t be too downhearted. But really he was most astonishingly like. Where does Mr Rose live?”

“Mr Rose is at present abroad.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that it was he! I couldn’t make a mistake like that—I’d far too good a look at him the other time, the dazzling creature! But you might find out if the family’s seriously addicted to monogamy, unless he turns out to have a brother after all. Well, when are you coming to see us? Better hurry, as we’re off very soon.”

“Where are you going?”

“Dinard. The three of us. Johnnie’s taken a villa. Have you settled what you’re going to do yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Then why not come over to us for a few weeks? When you get tired of me, Jennie’s getting most take-about-able. She’s seventeen. And—George——”

“Yes?”

"When a woman tells you she's got a daughter of seventeen there are quite a number of pretty things to be said——"

We continued to talk and walk aimlessly side by side. I had met her in Queen's Gate, and I intended to retrace my steps to Queen's Gate the moment I had got rid of her. She chattered on.

"And by the way, has Hastings mentioned Mr Rose to you lately?"

"No. Why?" I said. Hastings is my literary agent, the man beside whose labours on my behalf my own seem puny.

"Because I've got a feeling that this creature of all the talents really is coming off this time," she went on. "Hastings has found a publisher who's going to see that Derwent Rose is 'It' or die in the attempt. So if you want to do the Bear a good turn send him to Hastings. When is he coming back?"

"I don't quite know."

"Well, there's no immediate hurry. Everybody'll be away in another week or two. But it *would* be rather joysome to see Derwent Rose at last where he really belongs! Well, think about Dinard. Any time you like. 'Bye——"

And with a wave of her hand she was off.

Even when you think you are thoroughly accustomed to the idea of a thing it can sometimes come freshly over you; and merely in the professional part of me I had felt an oddly special little pang at Madge's last words. Here, apparently, was a publisher who believed in Derwent Rose and was prepared to back his belief with money; and—it was too late! Derwent Rose, wanderer, would never write another book. A few travel-sketches, perhaps, a few pen-pictures by the way, a few evening-paper articles; but another book—no. I wished that publisher no ill, but I did wish that he had recognised Derry's struggles, endeavours, faithfulness, strength, a little sooner than a day after the fair. Poor Derry would not have even the cynical consolation that while his real books had been neglected money would be heaped on him for his bad ones. He no longer had a book

left in him. A pugilist's manager would be of more use to him than a publisher now.

I passed up Queen's Gate and turned into the mews where I had arranged to meet Trenchard.

I had made my appointment with him because I had a question of special importance to ask him. I wanted to know whether Trenchard had seen him immediately before his departure, and, if he had, *how old he now looked*.

For the farther he travelled the more crucial this question became. From forty-five to thirty-five he might still pass as Derwent Rose, but he could hardly do so from, say, forty-five to twenty. I had not a moment's doubt that it had indeed been he whom Madge had seen and had failed to recognise—nay, had unhesitatingly assumed to be another man. Also my housekeeper's suspicions that all was not as it should have been had also been thoroughly awakened. "It is Mr Rose, isn't it?" she had asked me with a puzzled look on the Friday midday; but by Sunday morning Julia and he had become "the lady and gentleman" who had had to be fetched in to breakfast. Old Mrs Truscott again had unhesitatingly set him down as years younger than Julia. If Trenchard had seen him before his departure he had probably been the last of us to do so. Trenchard, in short, was to tell me what Derry's diary had completely failed to tell me.

For that little shiny-backed pocket book had merely brought things to a more hideously complicated pass even than before. I shall return to this diary in a moment; for the present let it suffice that, like the publisher's offer, it seemed to me to have turned up just a few hours too late. I had hoped for a survey wide enough, simplified enough, to help me to his rate of progress. I had so far found nothing of the slightest use whatever. I was without the faintest idea of his present age. He might have been thirty, twenty-five, twenty, younger. He might even be sixteen, at which age he had said he would die.

Trenchard I found to be a black-haired, pleasant-voiced,

very much alive fellow of a little under thirty. His rank, I believe, had been that of major, and even the atrocious crippling he had received at La Bassée did not destroy his look of perfect efficiency. He was just able to start up a car, and cars were his livelihood and he lived in them. I introduced myself, and he hobbled cheerfully about among his cups and bread-and-butter and methylated spirits.

"So," I concluded my introduction of myself, "as I'm settling up a few matters for him I wanted to know how you stood."

"Oh, everything's perfectly all right as far as I'm concerned," he laughed, filling the teapot. "Place left like a new pin, Bradburys in an envelope, and a quite unnecessary letter of thanks for what he calls my kindness. I was only too glad to have somebody in the place."

"Do you know what day he left?"

"Let me see. To-day's the ninth. He left on Monday, the fifth."

(Note: he had cleared out of Trenchard's place the day after I had seen him and Julia off at Haslemere Station.)

"He didn't say where he was going?"

He gave me a quick glance. "I say, this is all right, isn't it?" Then, laughing as I smiled, "Sorry, but one has to be careful, you know. No, he didn't say. Here's his note if you care to read it. I don't even know what to do with letters if any come for him."

Already I guessed that it would be useless to put my question; but I asked it none the less.

"You didn't see him before he left, then?"

"No. He simply left that note. It's dated the evening of the fourth, and it says he's off to-morrow. . . . By the way, what *am* I to do about letters?"

There wouldn't be any letters. Of that I was sure. But I gave him my address, wound up a pleasant chat rather quickly, and took my leave.

And now for that diary that, instead of helping me, had proved the greatest stumbling-block of all.

I had had not a moment's scruple in reading every word

of it, in trying to disentangle every diagram and equation it contained. Any question of ordinary decorum had long since passed out of the relation that existed between him, Julia, and myself. And let me repeat once more that a man who has questioned the universe until he has asked one question too many involves in his own fatality all who have to endure the contact of him. His state is apocalyptic, his existence merely spatial, without zenith of virtue or nadir of disgrace. If my roof had not been abused, neither did I violate his diary. I merely read it without a qualm.

Its oddity began with its very first page. Ordinarily on the first page of a diary you look for the owner's name and address. Here was no address; on the other hand there was a string of names. There were, to be exact, eight of them, with space for more, the whole written in his small fine hand and disposed in a neat vertical column. This block of names might have been from the everyday-book of any working novelist, part of whose task it is to label his puppets appropriately. I had no reason to suppose that hitherto Derwent Rose had ever gone under any name but his own. It had certainly occurred to me that he might sooner or later have to do so. This appeared to be a preparation for such a contingency. His own name of Derwent Rose, by the way, did not appear.

Opposite the names a diagram had been pasted into the book. It was on squared paper, such as draughtsmen use, of so many squares to the inch; and these squares had been numbered horizontally along the top with the years from 1891 to 1920, that is to say from his own age of sixteen on. Lower down the page, and still horizontally, red and black lines of various lengths were set in echelon. These were sprinkled over with numbers, which I discovered to refer to the pages that followed. Certain arrows pointed in opposite directions. Over these were written, in one direction, the words "'A' memory," in the other the words "'B' memory." This completed the horizontal arrangement.

The vertical set-out appeared to have given him much more trouble. It did not appear to have been completed. A

heavy black line ruled up through the year 1905 was lettered "true middle," but that appeared to be the only stable term of its kind. The rest was a mere rain of pencil-lines, momentary false middles that apparently he had tried to seize in passing. I knew by this time how unseizable they were. Not one of them lay on the right side of the true middle line. All overstepped it and travelled in a gradual procession towards the left of the diagram.

On other pages I found other diagrams. These were merely enlarged details of the foregoing, with days of the month instead of years.

One wild chart was an attempt to combine the whole in a single comprehensive statement. But this had completely beaten him. A serpentine whip-lash of pencil had been flung so viciously across it that one almost heard the crack.

The rest of the book consisted of text.

I was of course prepared at any moment to receive a telegram or letter asking for the book's instant return. If it really contained the key to his speed of retrogression it was probably the most important thing he had in the world. Therefore, lest he should claim it before I had finished with it, it stayed in my breast pocket when it was not actually in my hand.

And so I had three days' madness over the hateful thing. Twenty times I nearly tore it in two as he had once torn a six-shilling novel. Then at the end of the three days I put it down, leaned back exhausted in my chair, and asked myself what it was that I was really in search of.

I wonder whether the answer will startle you as much as it startled me. True, it came pat enough. There was nothing whatever new about it. It was merely what it had been all along, and I ought to have been familiar with it by this time. . . . I merely wanted to know his age. Just that and nothing more.

Yet of all the shocks that a man can receive, the shock of the expected and waited-for is sometimes the most profound. You know it is coming; it is therefore pure, funda-



mental shock, unalleviated by the lighter element we call surprise. When something you have lived with every day, taken for granted, thought you knew all about, have become familiar with to the point of boredom, suddenly so recalls attention to itself that all your habitual notions about it drop clean away, leaving you face to face with a strange thing—a line of verse, an object in your house, a tune, a picture, a wife—when this happens, then you may know that something has been wrong all along, is still wrong, and that if you would set it right you must go back to the very beginning again.

So there I stood, an unhappy, over-confident little scholar, whom the inexorable tutor silently points back to his task.

Humbly I returned to the book that, if it told me anything at all, must at least tell me this.

And now I must ask you to bear your portion of that little shiny-backed book too; for on a point of this importance I cannot allow you to accept my own conclusions on trust. You must know how I arrived at them. Where Derwent Rose was at that moment, what manner of man he was, what he was doing, how long he might continue to do it, whether he was alive at all—these things depended on no off-handed survey of his case, but on the dry figures, dates and details that I had hitherto neglected.

Fortunately we had a roughly-sufficient starting-point. This was the date of June 8th, 1920, the day when I had met him at the Lyonesse Club. It was not, it must be confessed, his true zero. The true zero was now undiscoverable. But I myself, in good faith and knowing nothing of all this, had judged him to be thirty-five that afternoon; he himself had confirmed my judgment, subsequent changes had sufficiently borne it out, and the diary now re-affirmed it.

So much for June 8th, when, if he had had an age at all, it had presumably been thirty-five. Thereafter he had disappeared for exactly three weeks, and on June 29th, a Tuesday, he had spoken to me in the picture-house in Shaftesbury Avenue.

On the following day, Wednesday, June 30th, I had returned to Haslemere, having left Julia waiting for her books in the reading-room of the British Museum.

Then, two days later still, on Friday, July 2nd, they had unexpectedly turned up together at my house.

Now a definite note in the diary, written as a matter of fact in my own house (for he kept it instantly up to date), told me that on that day, July 2nd, he had "felt twenty-nine." True, he had later admitted the vagueness of these mere "feelings" as an index to age, but there it was for what it was worth, and it agreed with the impression I had myself formed, based on his vivid and ecstatic and momentary moods. Except when I had compelled him to speak of his book, Saturday had been the counterpart of Friday. That is to say, that during the whole of Friday and Saturday he had remained twenty-nine.

Therefore (and omitting the loss of the years forty-five to thirty-five, now untraceable), during the twenty-five days from June 8th to July 3rd he had dropped a total of six years.

So far so good; but that was not quite what I wanted to know. What I was trying to ascertain was a far more important thing—the shortest *actual* time in which he had lost the great length of *apparent* time. It would make the greatest practical difference in the world whether this figure were a high or a low one.

And now groan, as I groaned, when you look at the four days between June 29th and July 3rd—those four days in which, in order that he might be at the very top of his power for the writing of his book, he had vehemently *denied* his age, had juggled with it, wrestled with it, refused it, ignored it, vowed that a false middle was or should be a true one, and had hung as it were to a strap while the whole momentum of his being had tried to sway him in another direction.

The entry for those four days was a mere question-mark with an open choice. It read:

"Thirty-three—thirty?"

And yet on the fifth day he had been twenty-nine!

Now let us take the queried figures separately and subtract. If on the fourth day he had been the lower figure—thirty—then he had only dropped a year in a night.

But if on the fourth day he had been thirty-three, then he had dropped four whole years in the same time.

Either was possible, and yet in the one case the ratio was, appallingly, four times as great as in the other.

And now that I was getting to the root of the matter I wished to take nothing for granted. His equations were high above my head, but I reviewed the position in terms of my own. This is how I set it out :

I HAD ALREADY KNOWN      THE DIARY NOW TOLD  
ME

That by June 8th he had slipped back from forty-five to thirty-five.

That on Wednesday, June 30th, Julia had been scheming to make herself his secretary.

That on the following Friday and Saturday, at my house, he had been vivid, momentary, intense.

That his "straphanging" age three weeks later (on June 29th) was "thirty-three—thirty."

In a pathetic little jotting of the same date, that he feared he would never write his book, that he was "getting too young for it," but that he intended to attempt it at all costs.

That he now doubted whether what he had at first thought to be will-power had really been that at all; in fact, that the real effort of will would have been, not to put his work out of his head for a couple of days, *but to remember it.*

At this point I began to grow excited. It seemed to me that at last I began to see light. I had taken him step by step from the starting-point of June 8th to the evening of Saturday, July 3rd, and the reason I had not gone beyond that date was that the diary itself stopped there. Its last

entry was the one I have just given—that he feared he had been mistaken in supposing that will-power had had anything whatever to do with that stolen week-end's holiday.

Oh, had there but been one, one single entry dated Sunday, July 4th!

For if it was possible for him to shuffle off four years in what I may call an ordinary night, what was *impossible* after an experience as stupefying as had been his on the night of Saturday-Sunday?

And yet in appearance it had not altered him. I had spent practically the whole of Sunday with him, and there had been nothing to indicate that he was not still twenty-nine. His manner, it is true, had been alternately jumpy and morose, but that might have been the mere vague pull of his *Wanderjahre*. Therefore it looked as if that mad onslaught of Julia's on his stability had passed him over after all.

*Ah, but wait a moment!* . . . I sat up at my desk, vociferating the words aloud. Were we at such a dead end after all? Perhaps not. . . .

And first of all I remembered that question I had asked him about the flash-lamp as he had stood behind the screen of rugosa roses on the Sunday afternoon. "Has there been a moment since yesterday when that lamp has been held as close as it could be held?" Again I saw his sudden pallor. Again I felt his clutch on my shoulder, again heard his faint "George—I've been trying to remember . . . the lamp . . . very close . . . touching . . . one intense brilliant spot . . . but I swear I never moved it . . . it was as if somebody took the torch out of my hand . . . somebody meddled in my life. . . ."

And he had made me go through his Saturday evening's programme again—his inspection of the Hogarths, his unusual wakefulness, the hour at which he had gone upstairs.

Only for a few moments on the Sunday morning had he seemed dimly to surmise that something of the last importance might have happened to him during the hours of darkness. He had then forgotten all about it.

Nevertheless, would not his next rejuvenation date, not the moment of the fact itself, *but from that of the beginning of his realisation of it?*

No—no—I was not quite right even yet. Even *that* moment of wild fear, so quickly gone again, was not the moment I sought. Even after *that* he might to all appearances have remained twenty-nine for some hours longer.

For his change happened while he slept, and I had not reckoned with that sleep that must come in between.

His next sleep had been, not in my house, but in Trenchard's loft.

*Monday morning, July 5th*, had been his new starting-point, and that day he had disappeared.

You have now all the material dates that I had. You know that in comparatively uneventful, unexciting circumstances he could go back four years in a night. And I have told you of the headlong rôle Julia Oliphant had taken upon herself.

How old, then, was Derwent Rose when he woke up in Trenchard's rooms on the morning of Monday, July 5th, 1920?

Twenty-five?

Twenty?

Or sixteen and already dead?

## II

I now turn to that portion of the diary that seemed to confirm my impression that he had gone to France.

Both his memories, "A" and "B," appeared so far to be functioning normally. In order to ascertain this he had applied a number of ingenious tests to himself. But it immediately struck me that while all his "A" (or Age) notes were written in English, all those in the "B" (or Boyhood) direction were in French.

And not only was the language French. The illustrations

and incidents were French in character also. Thus, he wrote in English: "Have been trying to see how much of *Esau* I can remember without looking at the book"; but of something that had once happened in Marseilles I read: "Je tâche de me débrouiller de ces souvenirs-ci." There might have been purpose in this alternation of the two languages, but I was more inclined to think that he had done it purely instinctively. When a man speaks a language as Derwent Rose spoke French he finds a pleasure in the mere exercise of his attainment. France had always attracted him, he had not unlimited money at his disposal, and mere considerations of ordinary time (an intensely special thing to him) might preclude his getting more than a few hours' journey away. Anyway, with one thing and another, I had chanced it, and guessed that somewhere on the north coast of France would find him.

"And you're going over there to stay with the Airds," Julia mused. "Then there's just a possibility——"

"Oh, the whole coast will be swarming with English by the end of the month."

"Still——"

"Do you want me to let you know if I come across him?"

"Oh, I don't know. I leave it to you. Do just as you think. When are you going?"

"On the thirtieth."

"What about his money?"

"Oh, he needn't worry about that."

"George"—she looked at me accusingly—"I believe you've bought those things of his yourself."

"Bought's hardly the word," I laughed. "Anyway, why shouldn't I?"

"And you're going to finance him."

"Well, the man's got to eat. And Carpentier *might* knock him out."

She looked away down the crowded tea-room and made no reply.

She herself had chosen the Piccadilly, and I looked at her again as she sat there, tucked away in a far corner of the

room, with merry parties at the neighbouring tables and De Groot playing the "*Relicario*." She was differently and quite brilliantly dressed. As far as externals could assist her, she appeared to have resolved to go back step by step and hand in hand with Derwent Rose. Her furs were thrown back, showing the V-shaped opening of her brown *charmeuse*, perfectly plain except for a tiny bronze beading at the edge and a lump of amber on a fine gold chain. Her arms were dropped over the sides of her chair, making from throat and dropped shoulders to the tips of her fingers one mantle-like flowing line. Her dark hair was arranged after a different fashion, and on it was a little brown brocade toque with owl's ears sticking out. About her younger women chattered and laughed, but among them she seemed to be—I hardly know how to express it—above rather than out of the picture, architecture to their building, a contralto melody underrunning their treble and fragmentary tunes, a white marble against which their fountains glittered and rainbowed and splashed. No shawls, worsted stockings and hot milk here! If Derry must be young, she too would be as young as clothes could make her. And I could not deny her success.

Not a word had I said to her about my discovery of his diary. I did not see what help it would be to do so. It could only open up the rather dreadful question, whether, in suddenly thrusting into the infinitely-delicate mechanism of his progression no less potent a factor than herself, she had not brought irreparable ruin upon him. More and more I had begun to fear that this might be so. I have already said how little I was concerned with the mere right or wrong of her theft, gift, or whatever else she liked to call it. That was swept aside in the singularity of the whole catastrophe. But for him I was deeply anxious. I could not shake off the impression that this time he must have "dropped" very heavily indeed. I thought I knew now why he had not telegraphed for that diary. It was of little further use to him. He had begun it with that torch at the cool and wide and "philosophic" range; he had continued it at the "emotional"

focus of keen and rapid sensation; but at that point the diary had stopped. There was no entry since Julia Oliphant, seeing her Eden twice and no angel with a flaming sword guarding this unsuspected postern of it, had set all a-flux in one blinding spot of irrevocable contact. Could the torch, after that climax, ever be withdrawn again? Was he at this moment burning out the residue of his youth at its whitest heat of combustion? Was he, since that last sleep in Trenchard's place, rushing through the months and years so swiftly as to gasp for very breath?

And if so, what were those experiences that swept down on him in one wild blurr of things long since finished with, unrepeatable in their original form, and yet inevitably to be repeated in that form or in another?

To all this Julia was still the key. One or two trivia in his diary apart, she was the only key. She it was who had received those letters of his from Nîmes, Arles, Trieste, and who farther back still had known his childhood, its happiness, aspirations, beliefs, dreams. Whatever soil he trod at this moment he must still be the boy she had known in a Sussex village. French stained-glass instead of English might hold his rapt eyes, the organ of a High Mass evoke raptures in his Anglican heart, but he was still the same.

And, before that stage was reached, the wild and reckless English years might even now be re-enacting themselves somewhere in the Pas de Calais, Ille-et-Vilaine or the Côte du Nord.

And she who had given that extra spin to the already whizzing wheel of his fate sat there in the Piccadilly, her head a little back, her lips a little parted, her dark eyes sensitised to all the glitter of the room, the fingers of one down-hung hand moving in time to Raquel's song.

Suddenly I broke in on her mood.

"Julia. As a practical matter. How do you suppose he got to France? It isn't easy for a man without papers of any kind, you know."

"Oh, he'd get there if he wanted to," she answered, the fingers still beating time.



"Easy enough to talk, but we may as well look at the practical side of it. *He'll* have to."

"If you mean his money, that's very nice of you, George, but I thought that was all arranged? Or do you mean that as he used to write to me before he may do so again? If that's it you can hand his money over to me."

"I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking——"

But she interrupted me vivaciously. "Oh, look at that woman in the cloak just getting up! That's *rather* a wrap, isn't it? And I wonder whether I could wear those shoes! . . . Now that's what I call having the best of both worlds, George. She's all the advantages of that flapper with the nice fair-haired boy there—the one smoking a cigarette and showing her garters—as well as being a woman. But perhaps she isn't your type. Men do run to types, don't they? . . . George, you're not listening. I asked you whether men ran to types."

"If you mean do I, you've had most of my time lately."

"Don't be silly. I mean women men are in love with. Or are you all ready to toy with anything that comes along?"

"I thought that you said the end of that man was that he knew nothing about women."

"Oh, what's the use of telling me what I used to say!" She tossed the little cap with the owl's ears. "At any rate I don't talk the same folly twice. Life's too short. Do you like my hat?"

"Very charming."

"Not absurd on me? Nor the way I've done my hair for it? I'm not mutton-dressed-as-lamb? And you haven't seen my shoes——"

Round the leg of her chair she pushed a suède sheath slender as one of the willow-leaves on my pond.

"I do hold my own? Among all these smooth hairs and pretty complexions? I haven't got a touch of powder on; do you think I should? Don't flatter; honestly; should I be all right if I met Derry?"

I looked at her without smiling. "Which Derry?" I asked.

"Oh, any Derry! Derry at his maddest, his wildest! Tell

me, George: if I'd had just one grain of sense before instead of being a sloppy art-student he only remembered once in six months, all flat heels and hair in her eyes, thinking that by cutting sandwiches . . . don't you think, George? Mightn't it have made a *wee* bit of difference? And won't it still when——"

"When what?"

"Oh—any moment! Who knows?"

I tried to break the current of her infatuated fancies. "Julia, don't you think——" But her eyes laughed me down.

"Think, George! . . . But this *is* thinking! You've no idea of the amount of brainwork there is in it! Oh, I'm not talking about rubbishy books and pictures now! Why, this is all the thinking I've ever done!"

"I was going to ask you whether you thought that things with him were—going quicker than they ought to, let us say."

"Not if they bring him back to me."

"But you let him go away."

"Oh, on his *Wanderjahre*. I dare say that's all over by now."

"Then you do think he may have—speeded up?"

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"Nothing would surprise me."

"But this particular thing?"

She shook with soft laughter. "Oh, George, some nice steady-going woman—like I used to be—ought to adopt you. . . . Why, you stupid, as if I wasn't *willing* him to speed up, as you call it, with every particle that's in me, if only I can manage to be somewhere at hand when he gets there!"

I gave her a quick look. "Do you mean that you're going to slip over to France after all?" I demanded.

"No. Wasn't thinking of it. As far as I know at present I shall just stay here. But," she said meaningly, "if I were going anywhere it wouldn't be France."

"Where would it be?"

"Belgium."

"Belgium's about the last place anybody with his war-experience would go to for a holiday."

"What, Antwerp in August?"

"I don't see. Sorry."

"Aren't they holding the Olympic games there?"

"Ah! . . . So you think they might draw him?"

"I didn't say so. I don't know as a matter of fact that I should go to Antwerp either. But you once asked me whether I thought I could bring him by just sitting still and loving him. Well"—a victorious smile—"I almost believe I could—now. But I shouldn't cut him sandwiches—now. I shouldn't be just somebody he remembered when he was at a loose end—now. I'd have him keen, George-old-Thing. He'd think anything I gave him a devil of a favour. Look at that wise young minx with the garters there; I'd have him to heel as she has her boy. Look, she's having a cocktail. Order me a cocktail, please."

"Which? Martini? Manhattan? Bronx?"

"I dunno. Never tasted one in my life. But I'm not too proud to learn. And—Geordie"—she shot a sidelong glance at me—"I've half a mind to begin practising on you!"

"Well—if that will keep you from practising on anybody else—"

"You think you'd be safe, George?"

"Wretchedly safe."

All at once the hectic manner seemed to fall from her. A little incision appeared for a moment between her brows. She pressed it away again with her fingers.

"I suppose so," she said quietly. "You can't say ours isn't an extraordinary relation. It's safe to say there's nothing like it in this room."

Nor anywhere else, I thought; and I was glad to think so. I am an average, more or less straight-living man, with a bias towards virtue rather than the other way; but almost any relation, it seemed to me, was to be preferred to this unnatural inhibition that had so singularly little to do with virtue. Allow me, as a man who possibly has been nearer to these things than you have, to give you a little advice,

Avoid, by all means in your power, contact with a man who has put over the reversing-gear of his life as Derwent Rose had done. He will land you in his own net. Unless you are more magnificently steady than I, even when it comes to your relations with an admirable woman you will find yourself interfered with at every step you take. Even the evil that you would you do not, and the good that you would not, that you do.

But it was a question of her rather than of me. I was only at the fringe of the moral commotion Derwent Rose had made on this planet. She was deliberately advancing on its very storm-centre. And in the very nature of things she was doomed to frustration. It seemed to me that she had already frustrated herself. For suppose she should succeed in her aim, and should pull off—well, whatever Rose had hinted at when he had spoken of Andalusian dancers and tilted mirrors in Marseilles sailors' kens. What then? That had not been Derwent Rose! "Je tâche de me débrouiller de ces souvenirs-ci." Where was her success, seeing that it had been the greatest of his dreads that he must re-live that dingy phase before finding the lovelier Derwent Rose who dwelt away on the other side?

Therefore, do what she would, her lot was as predestined as his own. Her successive rôles awaited her also—sister, aunt, elderly friend. But the way to Eden—ah, *that* she would terribly contrive! He, sick with a twice-lived anxiety, might turn away from his fence; but she approached it from the other side. Dust and ashes to him were all enticement to her. Once already she had put herself in his way; but what was once? . . . Ah, these inappeasable human hearts of ours! We cry "Give me but this, Lord, and I ask no more." But, having it, we must have more. "Nay, Lord, so quickly gone?" . . . She recked not that presently his sins would be all un-sinned again, while her own would be upheaped an hundredfold. Her lot was his. Jointly they advanced on a common fate. When all was over she would put off those crafty garments again. But until then he was to be tripped—at his maddest, at his wildest.

"Julia," I said with a failing voice, "for his sake can't you let it rest?"

She turned quickly. "What do you mean—for his sake?"

"For pity of him—perhaps even for his life."

She broke out, softly, but with a concentration of energy that I can hardly express.

"For pity of him! And why of him? What about me? Why do you try to separate us? We never were separated really. All that ever separated us was my own ignorance and conceit and not having the right hair! I'll bob it—I'll peroxide it—I'll do anything—but I'm not going to stop now!"

I tried to quieten her, but she went passionately on.

"Pity of *him!* Why, it's for pity of him that I'm doing it! Why should he for ever give, give, give, and get nothing in return? He never did get anything—nothing out of his books, nothing out of his life, only this one magnificent thing that's happened! He's flung pearls away, all the splendid pearls of himself, flung them to the grunTERS as they did in the Bible, and all they wanted was common greasy farthings! Farthings would have done, and he showered pearls on 'em! And not one single thing did he ever get back! Oh, it makes me boil! . . . But I've picked up a wrinkle or two since then, George! Nobody ever told me anything about life, nothing that was true. They told me that if I opened my mouth and shut my eyes and never forgot that I'd been nicely brought up all sorts of lovely things would come of themselves. Nobody ever told me I should have to get up and get and fight for my own hand. I was to speak when I was spoken to, and what did it matter how I did my hair or what sort of shoes I wore as long as men understood I was a nice girl and not to be taken liberties with? They took their liberties somewhere else we weren't supposed to know anything about. The un-nice girls got the insults—and the pearls. We just went on being respected, and sometimes, if we'd been very nice indeed, one of us would get a greasy farthing after all the pearls were gone. They called that marriage, and said it was the crown of a woman's life.

That's what we were taught, George. That's what every woman of my age was taught. And look at Peggy there getting away with it as fast as she can!"

I touched her sleeve, but she refused to be stopped.

"And it was all my own fault for believing them. I ought to have thought it out for myself, like Peggy. It was my job, and I didn't do it. I painted idiotic canvases instead. It wasn't Derry's job. It isn't any man's job. I'd been throwing sheep's-eyes at him all my life; why didn't I say to myself, 'Look here, Julia my girl, this doesn't appear to be working somehow. Cutting sandwiches and letting him pose for you and mooning about him afterwards isn't doing the trick. You know he's—obtainable—because you know other women do it. What's the matter with *you*?'—I ought to have asked myself that, and I didn't. I let myself drift into being a 'good sort' to him. Stupidest thing a woman can do. I expect he'd have thought it a sort of sacrilege to kiss me. Sacrilege!——"

She checked contemptuously at the word, but went straight on.

"And now this has happened, just to him and me, and if it never happened before, all the more gorgeous luck! He *shall* have something back for his life. He shall know what love is before he dies. You can go to anybody you like for your portrait, George; Peggy and I are out for blood. What's the good of having luck if you don't believe in it? If being nice didn't work let's have a shot at the other thing. (Ah, so *that's* a cocktail!) So that's that, George. Something's bound to happen. He'll be writing to me or something; I'm not worrying in the least. . . . But I mustn't let my neck get all pink like this just with thinking of him." She fetched out a little mirror and a puff. "Nice girls used to do that, and it was called maiden modesty, and I'm damned if it paid. I'm perfectly willing to learn, either from Peggy with her garters or anybody else. . . . Ah, she's getting up! I must see her close to——"

She was on her feet. I heard her murmur, "I'm taller than she is anyway——"

"Sit down till I've got the waiter," I said.

But she continued to stand. She was looking after the girl she had called Peggy—erect, ready, perilously instructed, a beautiful danger. Her life had been one unvarying, starry lamp of love; now, for the beguiling of the Derry of those onrushing years of the heat of his blood, a hundred false fires were being prepared. And I could only remain silent at the wonder of it, that all was one, and that the false was no less true than the true.

### III

It still wanted a week to the thirtieth, but I had various matters to set in order, and the time passed quickly. I saw Julia once more before I left. She still nonchalantly left it to me, should I come across Derry, to let her know or not, as I thought best. She herself was not going very far—merely into Buckingham to stay with friends. She gave me dates and addresses, and then her manner seemed to me to show some hesitation.

"If he should write to me for money suddenly," she said. "You see, you won't be at hand."

"Oh, that's all arranged. He wouldn't wait till he was actually starving before he wrote, and Mrs Moxon is re-addressing all letters immediately."

"But suppose he wrote to me. I've no money."

"Then you can wire me. I'll arrange for a sight-draft."

Her hands smoothed down the body of a frock I had not seen before—a sooty shower of black chiffon over I know not what intricately-simple and expensive-looking swathing below.

"I believe you're afraid to trust me with his money," she smiled, preening herself.

This conversation, I ought to say, took place in her studio. Suddenly I looked up.

"Julia," I demanded, "where's that tallboy gone?"

"The tallboy? Oh, it's somewhere about the place."

"On your back?"

"Not all of it. Some of it's on my feet. Don't you like them?"

She showed them. I turned away.

"Then," I said, "if *he's* selling furniture to pay for a holiday, and *you're* selling it to buy frocks, I certainly shan't trust you with a penny. If he writes to you you'd better wire me."

"Poor Julia!" she laughed. "When she was sensible she could do nothing right, and now that she's quite mad she's as wrong as ever. Well, a short life and a gay one. Good-bye, George, and a happy holiday——"

So the evening of the thirtieth found me on the St Malo boat, hoping it wasn't going to rain—for I had looked down below and preferred the deck. Smoothly we glided down Southampton Water. The boat was packed, and I was unable to dine till ten o'clock. Then I came up on deck again and set about making myself comfortable for the night.

It did rain, but I was well tucked away in the shelter of a deck-house, and was little the worse for it. A fresh south-west wind blew, and I watched the phantom-grey water that hissed and rustled hoarsely past our sides. The throbbing of the engines began to beat softly and incessantly in my head, and half dozing, I found myself wondering what Derry had done about his passport. "Throb-throb," churned the engines . . . perhaps he had forged himself a seaman's and fireman's ticket, signed on as a deckhand or stoker, and had given the L.S.W. Railway Company the slip the moment he had got across. Dreamily, muffled up in my wrappings, I tried to picture it. He would be careful. He would be careful about his beard, for example. He would let it grow a day or so before; perhaps he would now continue to wear a beard. Unless. . . . And he would sleep the day before and stoke through the night. A stoker for a night, dressed in a boiler-suit or stripped to the waist, as he had stripped when he had held Julia Oliphant's sewing-machine aloft. And grime in his golden beard. Or else the author of *The Vicarage of Bray* bending the warp on to the drum of the



steam-winch or putting the luggage in the slings in the hold. Oh, as she had said, he would get across somehow if he wanted to. . . .

And once across he would have very little trouble. He would mingle with the porters and camionneurs, carrying his gear in his hand. Probably he would pretend it was somebody else's. Then—the small luggage through first—*rien à déclarer*—his perfect French—he would be along the quay and in the vedette before they had begun to get the big stuff out of the hold. As for his passport—oh, he would manage. . . .

An employe picked his way through the dark huddles on the deck, took the reading of the log, and retired again. The masthead lights made loops and circles in the rain. I took a nip from my flask and dropped back into my doze. Alderney Light winked, and up the Race it blew stiffly. . . .

Yes, he would get across if he had made up his mind to. As for his *permis de séjour*—oh, things like that were for ordinary people. What would he do with a *permis de séjour* who had no *permis de séjour* in life itself, but must doubly dodge through it, from this place to that and from one date to the date before? . . . But I rather fancied he had gone by Dover. Certain notes almost at the end of his diary seemed an indication of that. These notes had no coherence—just odd words like “Lord Warden,” “boat,” “tide,” and a little time-table of figures. Apparently he had worked it out just before that week-end he had spent with me. . . . “Lord Warden”—that meant Dover—tide—time. . . . Again the Company's man came to take the reading of the log. Again the throbbing of the engines evoked the image of Derry, stripped, moving in the red glare of the furnaces, sweating, coal-dust in his beard. But perhaps he no longer had a beard. Perhaps Julia had made sure of that. Julia, desperate creature, wild, disturbing creature. . . . Peggy in her garters . . . selling furniture to buy frocks, shoes, stockings, scent. . . . “Pour Troubler,” “Mysterieuse” . . . “Mysterieuse, Mysterieuse, Mysterieuse,” sighed the water rushing past. . . . And in the Piccadilly, that long white

throat, the fine angle of her jaw, among little double chins, little buttons of chins, short necks, thrust-forward necks, square shoulders instead of that long mantle-like line down over her shoulders like swift water before it breaks, to the fingers that moved softly in time to the "*Relicario*" . . . the "*Relicario*" . . . De Groot . . . De Groot, De Groot, De Groot. . . . *Mysterieuse, Mysterieuse.* . . . Again the reading of the log, again the sailor's return through the dozing huddles on the deck; the phantom-grey water rustling hoarsely past, the masthead lights swinging aloft. I hate these short and crowded crossings when it is hardly worth while to take off your clothes and you arrive cramped, crumpled, unshaven, unrefreshed. I wondered how early it would be possible to get a cup of tea. A cup of tea—a cocktail—cocktails for tea—"So *that's* a cocktail!"—Manhattan, Manhattan, De Groot, De Groot, De Groot. . . .

Another pull at my flask, and then I really did sleep.

The day was grey when I awoke. The huddles on the deck had begun to stir. The east kindled, as I had last seen it kindle over the Devil's Punch Bowl and Gibbet Hill. The sun flashed on the waves, on people bestirring themselves, opening dressing-cases, making such toilets as they could. Then I heard the welcome click of teacups and flung off my rugs. I went below, secured a seat for breakfast, and made myself less unpresentable. Hot breakfast, after all, goes a long way towards obliterating the discomforts of a night on deck. As I rose from the table I glanced through the open port. Pale on the starboard bow was the long line of Cap Fréhel, ahead was St Malo's spire.

FRANCE

PART I

THE LONG SPLICE



## I

As the little vedette approached Dinard Cale—I had got quickly through the Customs and come across with the hampers of that morning's fish—an Alec Aird out of a Men's Summer Catalogue waved his hand to George Coverham out of a flea-bag and called out a cheery good morning. It was hardly yet half-past seven, so Alec must have been up betimes. He seized the two bags I pushed ashore and gesticulated to the driver of a nondescript sort of carosse. Then he looked me up and down and grinned.

"Ready for breakfast?"

"I'm ready for some hot water and clean clothes," I replied. "No, it wasn't so bad."

"And is this all the stuff you've brought? I asked you to come and stay with us, not just to drop in to lunch. Well, up you get. I don't suppose you'll see Madge and Jennie till midday. That damned Casino; three a.m. again last night. But it's no good talking to Madge. It always ends in her doing just as she likes. Why, when I was Jennie's age I didn't know there was such a thing as a roulette-table. . . . I say, have you brought any English tobacco?"

I had not been in Dinard, nor indeed in France at all, since before the war; but the long steep street where the little dark cafés were opening seemed very friendly and familiar. We rumbled past the English Club into the Rue Lavavasasseur, and instinctively my head turned to the right. Each short descending street gave the same remembered glimpse, of white casino or hotel at the bottom and the bright emerald beyond. We clattered down to the Place, and then slackened again to the ascent of dark tree-planted avenues. "Gauche—droit, I mean—starboard a couple of points," directed Alec, whose French bears no very great strain; and after ten minutes

or so the sound of our wheels suddenly ceased. We were on the soft sandy drive that ended at the gate of Ker Annic.

Alec Aird hates the Casino, partly because they won't let him smoke his pipe there, partly because he doesn't like his life strung up to concert-pitch all the time. But Madge loves these vast vestibules of shining mahogany and cut and bevelled glass, these palms that brush the electric chandeliers, these broad terraces, all this bright restlessness of hotels and shops and plage. So they had split the difference in the villa they had rented. It stood high-perched among ilex and Spanish-chestnut, looking out over the rocks and islands that make of that bay a jaw full of cruel black splintered teeth. It had little broken lawns set with hydrangeas and beds and borders of blood-red begonias and montbretia and geraniums and marguerites, the whole tilted up as if it would have spilled over the rough cliff-top to the rocks below. The plage itself was hidden, but a little way out the translucent greens began, dappled with a fairy-like refraction that brought the purple shoals almost up to the surface. After that away northwards spread the wide sea—serene yet curiously wistful, tender yet never gay, dreamily lovely but unflashing, unglittering—the pensive aspect of a sea that has its back to the sun.

“Here we are,” said Alec as we pulled up in front of a chromo-lithograph from a toybox lid, the villa of dove-grey with shutters of a chalky greeny-white and slender ironwork everywhere—grilles of ironwork over the glazing of the double doors, scrolled balcony railings, and iron passementerie along the ridge of the mansard-roof. “Now look here, if you want to go to bed say so, and we'll all be Sleeping Beauties—confound those rotten late hours for that kid——”

I assured him that I had no wish to go to bed.

“Right. Then come along upstairs, and sing out if there's anything you want. You'll find me somewhere about when you come down. And you might give me that tobacco——”

And, showing me up a staircase of waxed boards into my room, he left me to my toilet.

The pergola in which I found him three quarters of an

hour later was at the bottom of the garden. Its roof was latticed, so that over the floor, over the garden chairs and tables, over our shoulders and hands and white flannels, lay an intricate shepherd's-plaid of gay shadow that crept like a net over us whenever we moved. A *bonne* followed me with coffee and rolls, and we sat down to talk and to watch the flat untwinkling sea.

We, or rather Alec, talked of Boche rolling-stock on French lines (did I tell you my friend was by way of being a consulting engineer?); of coasting boats building at St Malo, of France's prospects of recovery from the devastation of the war. He thought they might pick up quickly, applauded the way they were putting their backs into it. And it may have been my fancy or the force of former associations, but already I was conscious of a different atmosphere. There seemed to thrill in the very air the push of a logical, practical, unsentimental people. I had felt it in the bustle of the porters and camionneurs on St Malo quay, in the unyielding Breton eyes of the fishwives in the vedette, in the ten francs that that scoundrel of a cocher had overcharged Alec. It began to be impossible to look over that sunny emerald water and to say to yourself, "A man with two memories is bathing in that," to sit in the warm cage of that pergola and to remember a man who clung to false middles and had extraordinary things happen to him in the night. Beyond the point a couple of fishing-boats and a brown-sailed bisquine appeared. Out toward St Cast crept an early pleasure steamer, its smoke trailing behind it like a smudge of brown worsted. From somewhere behind that toybox of a villa came rapid exchanges in French—the day's provisions were arriving.

Suddenly Alec looked at his watch. "I say, what about having a look in at the Stade? I expect there are a few of them there by now."

"Anything you like; what's on?"

"These elimination-trials for Antwerp next month," Alec replied, who was a Fettes man and an International in his day, and is still a familiar figure at Twickenham and Black-

heath. "Haven't you seen the posters? 'Debout les Athlètes'—'Sons of the Patrie'—they've been all over the place for months. All out they are too, and some dashed good athletes among 'em. There's one fellow I've heard of called Arnaud—haven't seen him—in fact he's a bit of a mystery . . . but look here, we've only just time for the tram. Come along——"

The filthy little tram took us to the Stade in ten minutes. It was an open field, with tracks and hurdles and a small white-painted Grand Stand at one end of it, and already *les athlètes* had got down to work. There were perhaps a dozen of them, in zephyrs and shorts and sweaters, leaping, practising short bursts off the mark, doggedly covering the outer track or resting in twos and threes on the grass. Several of them wore little more clothing than a pair of shoes and a waist-sash. They flaunted their glossy sunburnt backs, stood with arms folded over uplifted chests, heads erect, eyes flashing, and never a smile. No Briton would have dared to display such physical naïveté. They might have been grimly training, not for a sporting contest, but for a duel to the death.

We watched them for an hour, and then the whooping of that horrible little tram was heard in the distance. It hurtled up to the Halte, fouling the air with the smoke of the dust and slate and slack that served it for coal, and we sat with our backs to the engine and took what care of our flannels we might.

The sluggards had descended by the time we reached the house again. Among the harlequin shadows of the pergola Madge advanced to me with both hands outstretched.

"Monsieur! Sois le bienvenu!" Then, standing back to look at me, "What nice flannels, George! Some of the Frenchmen here, quite nice men, go about in the most extraordinary cheesecloth arrangements, and as for their shoes——! Yes, I think I can be seen with you. You can take me shopping this afternoon. I saw it in a window yesterday but hadn't time to go in. ('It's' a hat, if you must



know, Alec.) And this is Jennie, in case she's grown so much you don't remember her."

There was a time when I used to kiss little Jennie Aird, but I should not have dared to kiss the young woman who stood before me now. Take-aboutable, by Jove! . . . Jennie had her father's colouring, golden-red hair over a tea-rose-petal complexion lightly freckled; and if her eyebrows were faint, that somehow merely seemed to enhance the steady clear pebble-grey of the gaze beneath. She was six inches taller than her mother, and whether it was the smallness of her short-featured face that made full her beautiful throat, or whether it was the other way round, I will not attempt to say. Nor do I remember whether her hair was up or down that day. I have an idea that at that time it was sometimes the one and sometimes the other. Her gesture as she offered me her hand had the proper condescension of such a creature for a battered old piece of goods like myself. I wondered whether I ought to call her Miss Aird. These things come over one with rather a shock sometimes.

We lunched in a shining little salon, the exact centre of which, whether you measured sideways, lengthwise or up-and-down, was occupied by an enormous gilt Ganymede and Eagle lamp slung by heavy chains from the ceiling—for the lighting was either oil or candles at Ker Annic. Then back to the pergola for coffee. The tide had receded, and the rocks and the stakes that marked the channels stuck up everywhere menacingly—the Fort, Les Herbiers, Cézembre. The warm air was laden with the smell of genets, the sky was brightly blue over our white lattice. I saw Alec preparing to doze.

"Well, what about Dinard?" I said to Madge.

"Sure you wouldn't rather follow Alec's example? Very well, we'll drop Jennie at the tennis-place and you and I'll go off on the prowl. I'll be ready in five minutes. Jennie!"

She ran up to the house, and I waited for her on the sandy drive.

We walked into Dinard. The magazin that enshrined

"It" was near the Casino, and there, in an impermanent little white-screened and gilt-chaired shop that had hardly been open a fortnight and would close down again the moment the season was over, I had a soothing half-hour while Alec's money took wing.

"Mais tiens, Madame"—the saleswoman's witty fingers touched, hovered, butterflyed, while the hat became half a dozen different things under the diablerie—"posé commé ça, en effet sur l'oreille—Claire, la voile verte—lègèrment—oh, m'sieu!" A delectable gesture of admiration of everything and everybody concerned, the hat, the veil, Madge, herself, as unabashed as the attitudinising of the sunbrowned young athletes. "On dirait un sourire sur la tête de Madame!"

So, on a purely hypothetical rate of exchange, Madge bought three, and we sought the teashop and Jennie.

All English-speaking Dinard meets at that teashop in the afternoon. From four o'clock onwards it is a mob of youths in the blazers of Eton and Charterhouse and the Old Merchant Taylors, forking gateaux from the glass counters for themselves, their sisters, other fellows' sisters, their sisters' friends. Their days sped in tennis, bathing, tennis, a hurried déjeuner between the sets, tennis, watching tennis as they waited for a partner or a court, a sudden flocking to the Le Bras for tea, tennis, dancing, chocolates, and the programme for the tennis for the next day. They filled the ground-floor of the shop, made a continual coming and going on the staircase that led to the room upstairs. I steered Madge towards the table where Jennie was already seated, and found myself with young Rugby on my right, his shirt open at the neck, flannels hitched up over his white-socked ankles. About me buzzed the whirl of talk.

"He saw him at Ambletouse, and he did it in ten in his walking-boots on grass——"

"Rot! It's run in metres, not yards, and the record's ten and seventh-tenths——"

"American——"

"I bet you——"

"Well, it's nearly the same, and in his boots on grass——"

"Oh, put your head in a bag! Jennie, we've got Number Four Court for five-thirty, remember——"

"But I tell you this chap Arnaud——"

"Do let me get you one of those strawberry things, Mrs Aird——"

"My brother saw him—he just threw off his coat and waistcoat and ran as he was——"

"Mademoiselle, trois thés, s'il vous plait——"

I spoke in Madge's ear.

"She's a very beautiful child."

"Jennie?" said proud Madge. "Rather a young queen, isn't she? But Alec's perfectly absurd about her. Thinks young people to-day are the same as we were. She shall have the best time I can give her."

"Any——?" I looked the question.

"No. Quite asleep. She's perfectly happy dancing and dreaming and talking sport with these boys."

"Who are they?"

She told me. She knew half Dinard, and the printed Visitors' List gave her the rest.

"Well, well," was all I found to say, as I looked at Jennie again.

For while woman's beauty is coeval with Time itself, you have only your own allotted portion of it. The loveliness that comes too early or too late is no more your affair than the dawns before your time, the sunsets after you are gone. Madge at the midday of her life was still within my reach at my post-meridian, but Jennie would bloom like a rosy day-break when my own evening star appeared. Young Rugby, young Charterhouse, would write his vers-libre to that small head, sweet throat and the red-gold of her hair. . . . But I hardly know why I write all this. I am only trying to show how sorely I had needed a change and how grateful I was now that it had come. I knew that I was welcome to stay with the Airds as long as I pleased. It didn't matter if I didn't write another book for ten years, it didn't greatly matter if I never wrote another. I didn't want to write. That ethereal sea, that multi-coloured plage, the genet-scented air,

the feeling that all about me were people who knew what they could not do and wasted no time in attempting to do it—ah, they live their lives from the beginning and end them at the end in that fair and unperplexed land of northern France.

## II

Both by Alec and Madge, Jennie's education was discussed before me with complete freedom.

"Stuff and nonsense!" Madge would roundly declare.

"Look at those two Beverley girls!"

"Very nice girls, I should have thought," Alec would growl.

"Yes, and who's ever going to marry them? Nobody as far as I can see. That's Vi Beverley's fault. She's let them sit in one another's pockets, and have their own silly family jargon, and think that the rest of the world's a cinema just to amuse them, till they don't know how to talk to a stranger without being rude. They positively freeze any young man who goes near them, and when they do go away it's to cousins. Family affection's all very well in its place, but you can have too much of it. Jennie shall take people as they are. If she does miss an hour's sleep once in a while she can stay in bed all next day if she wants."

"Better teach her baccarat and have done with it."

"Well, she needn't faint when it's mentioned. This is 1920. If ever those Beverley girls marry it will be one another."

"If she begins to think of marrying in another four or five years——"

"She's not going to sit on the arm of your chair for five years while you read the *Paris Daily Mail*. . . . Anyway, about to-night's party——"

Then, on the way to the Stade or the Club, I should have Alec's view of the matter.

"When we were kids, if we were allowed to stop up once

a year for a pantomime . . . beastly mixed sort of place like this too! Madge doesn't know half that goes on. Why, before I'd been here three days one of the waiters at the Grand had the infernal neck to come up to me and whisper——”

I broke into uncontrollable laughter. The idea of a waiter whispering alluring suggestions to Alec Aird of all people was altogether too much for me.

“And what did you say?” I asked him.

“Say?” said Alec grimly. “When I said ‘Frog’ he jumped, I promise you that! . . . And mark you, these French fellows look after their own women all right—got their hands on their elbows all the time. It's only our confounded ideas of freedom——”

“But there's no harm in to-night's party——”

“Oh, that's all right. That's at home. We can turn 'em out at ten o'clock, and be in bed in reasonable time. It's that damned Casino I bar——”

And so on. Early to bed and a nap after lunch certainly suited Alec. I have seen once-fine athletes settle down like this before.

I had been at Ker Annic some days, when about the last thing I expected had happened to me. I have just told you how little I cared whether I ever wrote another book or not. Well, that morning I had remained in my room after coffee and rolls to write a couple of necessary letters. These finished, I had sat gazing out of the window at nothing in particular, lazily content with the beauty of the morning. Then, suddenly and without the least premeditation, I had taken a fresh sheet of paper and had begun to make detached and random notes. These had presently strung themselves together, and by and by a phrase had sprung up of itself. . . .

Whereupon, in the very moment of my despairing of ever writing again, I had realised that my next novel was stirring within me.

Now let me tell you the part that Jennie Aird played in this.

I frankly admit that the writers of my own generation

have sometimes been a little smug and make-believe about young girlhood. We have seen a lovely thing, and perhaps have let its mere loveliness run away with us, to the loss of what I believe is nowadays called "contact." We have not seen the butterfly's anatomy for the pretty bloom of its wing. Nevertheless, I cannot see that the eager young morphologists who are succeeding us have so very much to teach us after all. To read some of these you would think that the whole moving mystery had been disposed of when they had said that a young girl became conscious, shy, and had a talk with her mother. If it must be anatomy or bloom, I think I shall go on preferring the bloom. I have no wish to exchange the eyes in my head for that improved apparatus that turns a woman's hand that is meant to be stooped over into a shadowy bundle of metacarpal bones.

At the same time I do not take it for granted that youth is necessarily the happiest season of our lives. I remember my own youth too well for that. Emotionally, I am aware, it is all over the shop. It will giggle in church or make a heartbreak out of nothing, indifferently and with tragical facility. It is exploring the new-found marvels within itself against the day when its eyes shall open to the miracle of another. That, at any rate, and as nearly as I can express it, was the state of Madge Aird's sleeping beauty of a daughter on the evening of the party of which Madge and Alec had spoken.

It was a ravishing evening of late light over an opal sea. The same dusk that turned the begonias velvety-black in their beds made luminous the pale hydrangeas, until they resembled the glimmering whites and mauves of the frocks that moved in and out among them. The villa was lighted up like a paper lantern, and the moving couples inside made ceaselessly wavering shadows across the lawn. Over the ragged bay the phares winked in and out, and beyond the ilex and chestnut a faint luminosity trembled—the corona of Dinard lighting up for the night.

They danced in and out between the wide hall and the salon where the gilded Ganymede struggled with the Eagle

—youngsters in their first dinner-jackets, sylphs with their plaits swinging about their softly-browned napes, their elders mingling among them or watching them from the walls. Madge, in a frock that seemed to be held up singly and solely by her presence of mind, played fox-trots. Alec was busy “buttlng” in the little recess where a scratch supper had been set out. The air was filled with the light talk in French and English, throbbled with the rhythm of the fox-trotting piano.

For half an hour or so I made myself agreeable to a number of ladies of whose names I had not the faintest idea; then, with a sense of duty done, I turned my back on the pretty scene and strolled into the garden. On the whole I was pleased with my day. That was what I had wanted—the solace and security of being at work again. Nothing world-shaking or tremendous; I simply wanted to get on with the unpretentious job that was mine, and incidentally to be tolerably well-paid for it. That, when all was said, was the way of wisdom, the kind of thing men very properly get knighthoods for and had their portraits hung up in Clubs. It seemed to me that I had been through a very evil time, and that now that I was rid of the weight of it life was worth living again. I paced the paths of the gay artificial little garden, my thoughts on all manner of pleasant times to come.

Near the end of the house grew an auracaria, forbidding and black. As I moved towards it I noticed a dim white shape beneath it. I was turning away again (for at a party like that no unaccompanied bachelor has any title to the dimmer corners) when the figure moved towards me. It was Jennie Aird—alone.

“Hallo, why aren’t you dancing?” I asked. I had already watched her dance four dances in succession with the same partner—young Kingston I believe it was.

She made a quick little grimace, but did not reply.

“This is rather a nice party,” I remarked.

To this she did reply. “It’s a beastly party, and I hate it.”

I drew certain conclusions; but “Oh?” I said. “What’s the matter with it? I thought it rather fun.”

"Everything's beastly, and I wish we were back in London," she snapped.

"Anything the matter, Jennie?"

"Oh, how I do wish people wouldn't ask one what's the matter!"

"Then come for a turn and I won't."

She put her hand indifferently on my arm. She was nearly as tall as I, and I noticed as we passed the windows that, that night at any rate, her red-gold plait had been taken up and was closely swathed about her nape.

Of course young Kingsley or young somebody else had said something or done something, or hadn't said or done anything, or if he had had done it at the wrong moment or in the wrong way or had otherwise conjured up the shade of tragedy. Therefore, as there are occasions when tact may take the form of talking about one's self, I talked to Jennie about myself as we skirted the garden.

"Do you know, something rather exciting happened to me this morning," I remarked.

She showed no great interest, but asked me what it was.

"It mayn't sound much to you, but it interests me. I think I've started a new book."

"I wish I'd something to do," was the extent of her congratulation.

"What would you like to do?"

"Oh, anything. I shouldn't care what it was. Anything's better than this."

"Than this jolly party?"

"Yes. Or else I wish I'd been born a man. They get all the chances."

I reflected that one man, somewhere in the world, would have a very enviable chance, but kept my thought to myself. "Been having a row with somebody?" I asked.

"No," she answered, I have no doubt entirely untruthfully. "I'm just fed up. I wish I could have nursed in the war or something, but I was too young. Or I wish I could write like you. But if I told father I wanted to earn my own living he wouldn't hear of it, and mother's one idea



is to dress me up and 'show me off and marry me to somebody. They don't know how sick I am of it."

I glanced at her as we passed the lighted windows again. That soft red sill of her lower lip was level, and just a shade short for the upper member of her mouth's sweet portal, so that the pearls within were negligently guarded. Temper and discontent were in her pebble-grey eyes. She gave her head an impatient toss, as if to shake off the thought of the boisterous young cadets and crammer's-pups within. In a day she seemed to have outgrown them, to have lengthened her mind as she lengthened her frocks—if young women do lengthen their frocks nowadays. She wanted to nurse, to write, to be a student or some personage's secretary, to say to the dingy world, "Here I am—use me and don't spare me," in the very moment when I and such as I, disillusioned and worn, were sighing "Enough—release me—or if that may not be, give me but once more, once more that first dawning joy!"

"I don't want to get married," she sulked. "Ever. Mother may laugh, but I won't. It would have been different in the war. I love all those darling boys who were killed. But these schoolboys are all the same. . . . You don't want a secretary for your new book, do you?"

It may have been my imagination, but I am not sure that there did not stir in my memory some faint echo, of a woman sitting under a murky dome as she waited for her *Manuel de Répertoire Bibliographique Universel*. I know these secretaries and their wiles, and if my answer had had twenty syllables instead of one I should have meant them all.

"No," I said.

We had reached the wrought-iron gates at the beginning of the sandy drive. Three or four cars were parked there, and apparently somebody or other was leaving early, for a chauffeur had just switched on the head-lights of a heavy touring-car that shook the ground with its muttering. Judging from the power of the lights it was the car of one of Madge's French friends, for no English car carries shafts so blinding as those twin beams that clove the darkness.

They made the windows of the house seem a dull expiring turnip-lantern. Their blaze lighted up every pebble, every blade of grass, defined the shadows of blade on blade. Out of the fummy darkness insects dropped, stunned with light, and moved feebly on the path. I drew Jennie behind the glare, and as I did so one of the English servant maids came up to me.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you, sir," she said.

"To me? What gentleman? Where?"

"A French gentleman, sir. A M'seer Arnaud his name is."

"Arnaud? I don't know any Arnaud. Are you sure he asked for me and not for Mr Aird?"

"It was Sir George Coverham he asked for, sir."

"Well, where is he?"

"Here—at least he was a moment ago——"

"Arnaud?" I mused. "Do you know a M'sieur Arnaud, Jennie?"

As I turned to her I saw her in that false illumination with curious distinctness. The soft upward glow from the path reminded one of a photographer's manipulation of his tissue-paper screens. She stood there semi-footlighted—smooth brows, low glint of her hair, the caught-up upper lip that showed the pearls, her steady gaze. . . .

Ah, her gaze! What was this, that made me for a moment unable to remove my own eyes from her face? At what object beyond the car was she so fixedly looking? Why had her bosom risen? Why, as if at some "Open, Sesame!" did that betraying upper lip offer, not two, but all the pearls within?

My eyes followed hers. . . .

As they did so sounds of talk and laughter and farewells drew near from the house. The departing guests were upon us.

But I had seen. If only for an instant before it retreated swiftly into the shadows again, I had seen. Gazing at her as steadily as she had gazed at him, the vision of a young man's face had momentarily appeared.

Then the babble broke out about us.

"Thank you a thousand times, chère Madame——"

"Delicieuse——"

"Merci, M'sieu' Air-r-r-rd——"

"Better have the rug round you——"

"Where's Jennie? Ah, here she is——"

"A demain, à onze heures——"

"Good-bye——"

"Good-bye, Sair-r-r George——"

But I still saw that face haunting the transparent gloom. A béret cap had surmounted it, a blouse *en grosse toile* had clothed the shoulders below. Monsieur Arnaud, if it was he, was dressed as an *ouvrier* or a sailor dresses.

And he was young, sunbrowned, grave, beautiful.

The car backed and turned. There was a grating as the clutch was slipped in, and then the engine dropped to a steady purr. The wrought-iron gates started out in the glare, the red tail-lights diminished. I was dimly aware that Madge said something to me, but I remained motionless where I stood. I came to myself to find myself alone.

Sunbrowned, grave, beautiful, young!

And he called himself Arnaud!

I have told you of that list of names with which his diary began. Arnaud was not among them. But Arnold was. He had simply Gallicised it, and as Arnaud he was seeking me.

Then I felt my sleeve timidly touched. His voice came from behind me, a voice with a charming, uncertain timbre.

"George—I say, George—who was that?"

### III

I will make a shameful confession. My heart had sunk like lead. I had wanted a holiday from him. That very morning I had thought I had secured it, had blithely planned my new and cheerful work.

And here he was, with his hand on my sleeve.

He repeated his words in a whisper. "George, who was that?"

Slowly I turned. "It is you?"

"Yes."

"How did you know I was here?"

"I saw your name in the Visitors' List."

"Tell me what I can do for you."

He fell a little back. "George," he faltered, "why this tone?"

I refused to admit at once that I was ashamed. "We can't stop talking here," I said. "Where are you staying?"

"Out at St Briac."

"Then I suppose you're walking back? The last tram went long ago."

"It's only six miles."

"Then wait here, and I'll walk part of the way with you."

They were still merrily dancing in the house, but I managed to get to my own room unseen. I put on an ordinary jacket and cap and descended again. He was not where I had left him. He had skirted the lauristinus bushes, and from a safe distance was gazing into the house.

Oh, inopportune—inopportune and undesirable in the last degree!

"Ready?" I said.

Reluctantly he turned away his eyes and followed me past the cars. We passed out of the drive and into the dark tree-planted lanes of St Enogat.

A ratty little ruelle runs along the side of St Enogat Church and makes a short cut to the high road. We passed the church without exchanging a word. At last, where the street widened, I broke the silence.

"So you're Arnaud now?"

"Yes," he said in a low voice.

"The athlete people are talking about?"

He muttered that there were lots of Arnauuds.

"You're a Frenchman anyway?"

"I've got to be something."

"Are you going to stay a Frenchman?"

"I don't know yet."

We continued our walk. The little white-painted Grand Stand of the Stade glimmered over the hedge on our right when next he spoke. I saw his glance at it.

"About those athletics, George," he said awkwardly. "I was an awful ass. If there's anybody who oughtn't to draw attention to himself it's me. But I did it without thinking. It was at Ambleuse. They were running and jumping, and I suppose my conceit got the better of me and I just had to have a go. But I've cut all that out. It wasn't safe. I don't go near a Stade now."

"Ambleuse? Then you did cross Dover-Calais?"

He hesitated. "Not exactly Dover-Calais. Thereabouts."

"Thereabouts? . . . I suppose you worked your passage and then gave them the slip?"

"No. I thought of that, but it was a bit too chancy."

"Then what did you do?"

"Well—strictly between ourselves, George—it's much better not talked about—you see my difficulty—but I swam it."

I stopped dead in my stride. "*You what!*"

He spoke apologetically, as if it were something not quite creditable.

"Yes. But I don't want to give you a wrong impression. I didn't swim it really fairly. Not like Webb and Burgess. I only swam it more or less. For one thing, I hadn't trained, you see."

I recovered my breath. "What do you mean by swimming it more or less?"

His modesty was almost excessive. "It was like this, George. You see I rather funked just jumping in at Dover and trusting to luck to bring me across. It's a devil of a long swim, you know, and besides, I had to have my clothes; couldn't land here with nothing on. So I got hold of a fellow at the Lord Warden, a boatman who'd been with Woolf when he just missed it. I swore him to secrecy and all that, and fixed things up with him, and he gave me tides and times and currents and so on. I told him I was only an amateur who didn't want to make a fuss till he'd had a sight-

ing-shot, and—well, it cost me a tenner. But it saved no end of trouble. He and another chap came across with me in a little motor-launch. I greased myself and got into a mask, and a mile out of Dover I went overboard. Even then I didn't swim it fairly, for I was hauled in again after about six hours for another greasing. My flesh was quite dead half an inch in, you see. I was sick too. If we'd been really meant to do that sort of thing we should have been given scales, like fishes."

"Well, and then?"

"Well—that's all. I landed a little this side of Grisnez, just as if I'd been out for an ordinary bathe. My chaps kept a sharp look-out for the coastguard, and smuggled my clothes on to a rock; my English ones, of course; I bought this rig in Boulogne. And in three or four days I was pretty well all right again. But I don't think I'd have the stamina to do it again. . . . I say, promise me you won't go talking about it, George. I've got to lie absolutely low. I frightfully wanted to go to Antwerp, but I simply daren't do it. I might be asked for my Army Discharge Papers, or something awkward like that."

So *that* was how he had solved the passport problem! Unable to walk the Straits, he had simply swum them, and had saved that night's stoking with coal-dust in his beard! And suddenly and inexplicably, I found something of my resentment already softening within me. There was a noble simplicity about his expedient, and even his voluminous corduroys and shapeless vareuse did not hide the magnificence of his build. And yet he, so magnificent, must forego that deep joy in his physical splendour if he was to preserve his anonymity. It passed him by as the publisher's belief in him had passed him by—as, it began to appear to me, all else in life must pass him by. Antwerp and the Stades for others, but for him, who would have won glorious laurels there—no. Nay, say he was now what he looked, nineteen or twenty. His athletic prime was already far advanced. He himself doubted whether he had the stamina to swim the

Channel again. This alone would have sufficed to win my compassion.

We were now well clear of St Enogat. The night was moonless, but the heavens were crowded with stars, and seaward the lights burned emerald, diamond, ruby. Southward over the land the eye wandered over the dim fruit trees that dotted the fields of sarrasin. A light breeze moved in the tops of the crooked poplars, and where the tramway leaves the road and takes as it were a dive into a wilderness of dark tamarisk and thorn a gramophone played somewhere in an unseen cottage. Already an intermittent paleness had begun to sweep the sky ahead: a pulse of faint light, four seconds of darkness, the pulse again and eleven seconds of darkness—the Giant of Cap Fréhel.

At least another ten years in less than a month! I kept stealing shy glances at him through the limpid darkness. Quite literally I felt shy in his presence, for he was both known and unknown to me. If he was now nineteen, I saw him now at nineteen for the first time in my life—grave and young, brown and beautiful. His talk had a gentleness and a modesty too. No wonder Julia Oliphant had loved him!

“Well, go on after you left Ambleteuse,” I said by and by.

“Oh, then I walked, and took train once in a while, till I got to Rouen and Caen and on here. Lovely churches all the way; I want to go to Caen again. That took me a fortnight. Then I’d a couple of days in St Malo, and—well, that about accounts for the time.”

“And what are you doing at St Briac?”

“Sketching. Taken a great fancy to it. I’ve got a bike cheap, and I either walk or ride. I stay at a rather shabby little place, but it suits me. I’ve only a couple of haversacks and my painting things, so I can be off at a moment’s notice if—if anything crops up.”

Charmingly and sincerely as he spoke, I was yet conscious of a reserve. He kept, as it were, to the surface of his itinerary, dwelling only on the outer details of his life. And, as little by little he repossessed me, I knew that I should

have to get behind this reticence. For when and how had he lost those ten years? In Trenchard's loft, or since, or partly both? Had he, when he had plunged into the sea a mile out of Dover, been still twenty-nine, or his present age, or some intermediate one? If I was to be of service to him it was necessary that I should know all this.

"Derry," I said, using his name for the first time, "I can't walk all the way to St Briac and back again. For one thing I'm dressed for a party. Let's sit down."

There was a warm dry earth-wall with heath and thyme and rest-harrow and convolvulus growing on it, and there we sat down. Opposite us opened the marshy gap of Le Port, and every four seconds, every eleven seconds, the aurora-like Light a dozen miles away was faintly reduplicated in the wet mud. All was quiet save for the ceaseless rustle of the ragged poplars, the creeping whisper of the tide.

"Now," I quietly ordered him, "I want you to tell me all the things you've been leaving out."

At first I thought he was going to behave like an obdurate boy, whose affairs are hugely important just because they are his. But he seemed to think better of it. In a hesitating voice he said, "What things?"

"Well, begin with Trenchard's place on Sunday night, the 4th of July. What happened then?"

His answer was hardly audible. "Yes, it was then."

"How much?"

"The whole lot."

"At one go you dropped from twenty-nine to—what is it now? Twenty?"

"Nineteen or twenty. I don't know. Yes."

"Then nothing's happened since then?"

"No—at least I'm not quite sure."

"Not sure?"

"No. I honestly don't know. There's been a gap somewhere, something I ought to have come to again, but that somehow I've missed altogether. I simply can't account for it."



"Explain, Derry."

He seemed hardly to trust his voice. "It's the queerest thing of all, but I'll swear it on a Bible if you like. You know what it was I funk'd more than anything—all those beastly rotten things going to happen all over again. . . . Don't let's talk about them. They were all the time like a nightmare to me, that I was drawing nearer and nearer to all the time. I tell you, I'd decided to put myself out rather than wallow through all that again. . . . Well, I can only tell you I've absolutely skipped it. On my honour I have. It's the most unaccountable thing, but——" He choked a little.

"But," I said, deeply pondering, "is it possible to skip a step—*any* step?"

"I should have said not," he replied. "Beats me altogether. I started on a dead straight course back, and I fancied I should have to take my fences as I came to them. But this kink's come, and somehow I've picked up the thread again clear on the other side of it."

I pondered more gravely still. "Wait a bit. It all happened that Sunday night, kink and all?"

"Yes."

"That was the night you left my place with Julia Oliphant, said good-bye to her at Waterloo, and went on to Trenchard's? Did you stick to that programme?"

"Yes."

("And so," something seemed positively to shout within me, "much good you've done yourself, Julia Oliphant! Much good you're still plotting! That gap that he's skipped altogether—that's precisely where you're setting the man-traps for him, you and your chiffons and your brown charmeuse and your new willow-leaf shoes! You'd better forget Peggy and her garters and get back into your nice quiet tea-gowns again!")

But aloud I resumed: "Then, if nothing's happened since that night, that means that you're now stable—stationary?"

His reply gave me a queer shock. It was in the last word that the shock lay. "As far as I can make out, sir."

"So you haven't got to move on from pillar to post and one lodging to another?"

"I've been at St Briac for ten days. And that isn't all," he continued earnestly. "I can't say for certain, and perhaps it's too soon to talk about it. So this is touching wood. But I've got a sort of feeling that if I'm careful and live perfectly quietly—no excitement and going to bed early, you know—I might be able to stick just like this for a long time. I know no more about that gap than you do, but it seems to have cleared the air like a thunderstorm. And when I tell you that I really intended to put myself out . . . oh, how thankful. . . ." But again he checked himself.

And I too found myself gulping to think that I had so recently wanted to wash my hands of him. Be rid of him? I knew now that not only should I never be rid of him, but that never again should I want to. Charming, innocent, beautiful and grave! I cannot tell you, for I do not know, what mysterious spiritual thing Julia Oliphant had actually wrought upon him. I only knew that all that he had so greatly dreaded she had taken upon herself, and that whatever her portion thenceforward was, his was complete absolution. "One for the Lord, the other for Azazel"; out into the wilderness she, the scapegoat, must go; but on him the smell of that fiercest fire of all had not so much as passed. . . . And I realised in that moment that thenceforward he was my charge—yes, my son had I had one. Must he stay in France? Then I must stay with him. Must he wander? Then I must wander too. For the rest of his unstable life I must be his staff and support.

"But I say, sir," he said shyly presently, "about why I dug you out to-night. I hope you'll say no straight away if you think it's fearful cheek, but the fact is I must have some more colours, and—well, I've got a little money in London, but I can't get at it just for the moment. So I really came to ask you if you could lend me five hundred francs."

This was strange. I shot a swift glance at him as he lay, a rich dark patch of blouse and corduroys at my side.

"Where," I asked him as steadily as I could, "is your money in London?"

"I have a little there," he said awkwardly.

"How much?"

"I don't quite know, but it's certainly more than five hundred francs."

"Where did it come from?"

Through the clear dark I saw his dusky flush. "I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have asked you. Never mind."

"Derry," I said, greatly moved, "tell me: are you remembering things quite properly? You surely haven't forgotten that I have your money?"

"Eh?" he said. The next moment he had tried to cover his quick confusion. "Eh? Why, of course. What am I thinking of? It did slip my memory just for the moment; stupid! I'd got it mixed up somehow with Julia Oliphant. I was going to write to her. I remember, of course. You sold my furniture. You did sell it, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"How much did it fetch?"

This time it was my turn to evade. "Well, as you say, more than five hundred francs. I—I haven't totted it up yet. I came away in rather a hurry. But there's quite a lot, and I can let you have all you want to-morrow."

"Then that's all right," he said cheerfully.

But I found it anything but all right. On the contrary, it was profoundly disturbing. If he could forget that he had authorised me to sell that black oak furniture of his he could forget more vital matters. Yet he had remembered the furniture when I had urged him.

"Tell me," I said more quietly, "as simply as you can, exactly what you do and what you don't remember."

"I only forgot it for a moment," he stammered.

"But you did forget it. Can you explain it?"

I felt that his mind laboured, struggled; but I was hardly prepared for what came next.

"Just let me think for a minute. I want to get to the bottom of it too. It's a thing I've been watching most care-

fully, and I give you my word I remembered everything absolutely clearly up to a couple of hours ago. I knew all about that furniture when I came to that place for you, because as I walked along I was trying to work out how much it ought to amount to. In fact I wasn't coming to borrow at all, but just to ask you for something on account. Let me think. I got there at exactly at quarter to ten——"

His fingers were playing with the wild flowers on the earth-wall. In and out through the whispering poplars the stars peeped. Every four seconds, every eleven seconds, four times a minute, rose and fell the Light. I fell to counting the intervals as I waited for his reply. Diamond, emerald, ruby, twinkled the lights at sea. . . .

Then suddenly he sat up and took a deep breath. I saw his radiant smile. He faced me with the starlight in his eyes.

"George," he said, "*who was that with you in the garden?*"

#### IV

For some seconds the stars seemed to go out of the sky. I seemed to be, not sitting with him on that earth-wall by Le Port gap, but to be standing again in the drive of Ker Annic, with the glare of a touring-car thrown up from the ground and Jennie Aird by my side. I seemed to see again her parted lips, to hear that soft intake of her breath. And his own face seemed to hang again like a beautiful mask suspended in the glow.

And when I had descended from my room again I had found him lurking in the bushes, gazing into the lighted house.

Stars in the night above us! Was that to be the next thing to happen?

Had it happened?

Evidently something had happened, and had happened during the past two hours.

Then, as I strove to grasp the immense possibility, a deep and hapless yearning flooded my heart. The loveliness, the loveliness of it had it been possible! She, with the dreams still unrubbed from her opening eyes, he a December primrose peeping up anew out of the roots of his wrecked and fruitless years—they would have been matchlessly coupled. Had he in truth been my son I could have desired no more for him than this.

Yet why do I say "had it been possible"? Possible or impossible, something, whether more beautiful or fatal I could not say, had in fact happened. Whether to her or not, it had happened to him. How else explain that treacherous little slip about his money? Up to then his memory had not failed him. Reticence he had shown, a youthful unwillingness to talk about himself, but not in order to conceal an impaired faculty. His account of his movements during the past month had been slight, but complete enough. One gap only—the Julia gap—he found unaccountable, and that was no enigma to me.

But was he now on the eve of yet another transformation? Had one look of eyes into eyes hastened him to another stage? Absolved he was; was he now to be, not merely absolved, but confirmed in all the beauty and liberty of that absolution? Consider it as I tried to consider it, sitting on that thymy earth-wall while Fréhel, like a ghostly clock, threw those wavering false dawns across the night.

Julia, by her ruthless act, had despoiled him of ten years of his life.

But Jennie had now seen him as Julia had seen him more than twenty years ago.

That act of hers constituted the gap that, try as he would, he could not account for.

But should another gap now come his heart would understand.

In some dark and hidden way Julia had taken upon herself his burden of sin.

He was now beautiful, grave, innocent and unafraid.

Julia, darkly machinating, was counting on waylaying him again, and yet again. But Jennie, as spotless as he, knew nothing of machination.

"He *shall* know what love is; why should he get nothing out of his life?" Julia had passionately cried. If his question to me meant anything, a wonder had happened to him not two hours ago.

On his former pilgrimage he had not known Love. But was Love the wonder now?

If so, it was Julia's gift when she had restored his innocence to him. And it was a gift to Jennie.

But the position was inconceivable, not to be thought of. Experience such as never man had possessed lurked behind that simulacrum of beauty by my side. Young as he was, he was old enough to have been Jennie's father. He was, he still remained, the man who had written *The Hands of Esau* and *An Ape in Hell*, the man for whom I had hunted in questionable London haunts, who had known to the full the sin and shame of his accumulated years. I knew, Julia knew, what contact with his ruinous uniqueness meant. How was it possible to permit such an error in nature as to allow him to fall in love with Jennie Aird?

Yet if he had already done so, what was there to do?

His voice sounded again softly by my side.

"You haven't told me who that was with you in the garden," he said.

"Let's finish with the other things first," I answered.

"Oh, I'm tired of talking about myself, sir."

"That's one of them. Why do you sometimes call me 'sir' and sometimes 'George'?"

He gave a start. "Have I been doing that?"

"Didn't you know?"

I couldn't catch his reply.

"When you were young I suppose you called older men 'sir'?"

"Of course."

"Do you think that at this moment you could repeat, say, half a page of *The Hands of Esau*?" (I had my reasons for choosing that book rather than another.)

"I think so."

"Will you try?"

"Shall you know if I'm right?"

"Near enough for the purpose, I think."

He puckered his brows and fixed his eyes on the road. He began to recite. *The Hands of Esau* had been written in or before 1912, and the year was now 1920. To remember even your own book textually eight years afterwards is something of a performance; but he was remembering, at nineteen, the words he had written at thirty-eight—a space of nearly twenty years. I stopped him, satisfied, but he himself immediately took up the running.

"Of course I see what you're after, but I've done all that myself. Honour bright, that about the furniture was the first slip of the kind I've made. But I've made one discovery."

"What's that?"

"You're starting at the wrong end. That memory's all right. It's the other one I've sometimes wondered about."

"Ah! The one you call your 'B' Memory! Do you mean—it sounds an odd way of putting it, but I suppose it's all right—do you mean you don't remember what sort of thing you'll be doing, say, next year?"

"Not very clearly, George. Sometimes that seems an absolutely unknown adventure. And sometimes it's like that queer feeling—I expect you know it—that you've been somewhere before, or done something before, or heard the same thing before. It lasts for a second, and then it's gone."

"Do you think it will continue like that?"

"I've stopped thinking about it."

"That page you repeated just now. That wasn't a stock page you—keep in rehearsal, so to speak?"

"No, that was pukka."

I considered my next question carefully. But there was no avoiding it; it had to be put. I watched him deliberately.

"Now tell me one other thing. Do you ever remember hearing or writing these words: '*Je tâche de me débrouiller de ces souvenirs-ci?*'"

Poor, poor lad! He winced as if I had cut at him with a lash. He turned over on the bank so that I could not see his face. He made no response when I placed my hand on his shoulder. My heart ached for him . . . but he had to be shown that any question of love between himself and Jennie Aird was impossible.

I shook him. "*Do* you remember that, Derry?"

Slowly he sat up on the bank. He turned a set face on me.

"Let me say, Coverham," he said tremulously, "that I went through a whole war without seeing as cowardly a thing as that done. I will not forgive you."

And with barely a moment's pause he broke out:

"Oh, what am I to do, sir, what am I to do? You're older and wiser than I am—I want help—advice——"

That is why I have called this portion of his history "The Long Splice." Extremes as wide apart as those met there and interwove their strands. Fortunate it was for me that they did, for had not that last helpless cry been wrung from him I should have been dumb before the bitterness of his reproach. Whether memories of sweetness and light were failing him or not, those of bitterness and gall remained, and it was on this quivering complexity of exposed nerves that I had laid the lash.

And yet simultaneously he was innocent, assailed, acquitted. Only the man he had been had groaned under the stroke; the other had turned to me for comfort and guidance and help. And what is a remembered self that we should weep for it? What is memory that we should writhe? No philosopher has yet ventured to write "I remember, therefore I am." Nor does a man remember entirely and wholly of his own will. He is his memory's



lord when he sets himself to repeat a passage from a book; but who is the master when something leaps upon him without warning from the past, tears open an old wound, and leaves him quivering and bleeding? . . . Derry's "A" Memory now seemed to me to be beside the mark, and it was with a sudden joy that I recognised it to be a boon that his "B" Memory was dissolving into a golden haze. "An absolutely unknown adventure," he had said; and what better, more merciful, more beautiful? As the Great Pity hides other men's ends from them, so his beginning was to be hidden from him. No remembrance of disillusion would mar for him the bloom of his fair discoveries. What though seas were sailed before if you know it not? Are the garden's scents less fragrant that you wonder, for a fleeting instant, when you have smelt them before? And what of the kiss of your mouth when that kiss is both an undoing and a re-beginning, the end of one dream but the beginning of a lovelier still? What Julia had done once Jennie would do again, and I had only to think of his innocence, his beauty and his doom to know, more surely than I ever knew anything in my life, that this would a thousand-fold transcend the other.

And—supposing that it had already happened, implicit in that single revealing look—*he had still to sleep that night.*

I forget in what words he began to plead his cause. His idea was this:

He conceived himself to be now stationary, or, if moving at all, to be doing so hardly perceptibly. Ignorant of the connection between Julia's attack and his putting-off of the years, he knew as little that similar results might follow what had happened in the garden of Ker Annic that evening. He would "hang on" by gentle and equable living, and to that extent, and if all went well, time might presently become to him something more nearly approaching what it was to anybody else. He even hazarded a suggestion wild enough to make the hair stand up on your head.

"And if I got as far as that," he mused, his eyes straight before him in the night, "I might even—it's no madder than

anything else—I might even start living forward again; but I suppose that's too much to expect," he sighed.

On this I simply refused to make any comment at all.

I had told him that Jennie was the daughter of my host. He was for making plain sailing of it. His outbreak about my cowardice, by the way, had been disregarded by both of us.

"But don't you see, Derry, you're so unimaginably different from anybody and everybody else," I repeated for the tenth time.

"Not if I can stop decently still," was his dogged reply.

"But you don't know yet that you can."

"You don't know that I can't, sir."

I couldn't enter into that. If I had ever intended to do so the time for it would have been on that Sunday afternoon behind the rugosa roses.

"You actually mean that you want me to take you to the house, and introduce you to Mrs Aird, and open up the way to—God knows what?" I demanded incredulously.

"You offered to introduce me to Mrs Aird once before."

"I offered to introduce the man I then knew."

"Am I any worse now?"

"There's no question of better or worse. A thing can be done or it can't, and this can't."

"Do you mean because of my clothes and my being a Frenchman and all that?"

"I mean, simply, your being Derwent Rose. And I don't know that the other things are quite as simple as they look either."

"But I'm English really. And I've got a decent suit of English clothes."

"Do they fit you—or did they merely do so once?"

At this he became almost cross. "Look here, sir," he said, "when everything's said I *am* me, and I feel pretty sure I can stop as I am. Dash it, I *am* on the blessed map! I'm quite a passable nineteen as fellows go, and the rest's all rubbishy detail." Then his manner changed. His voice suddenly shook. "You see, I'm—I'm—I'm in it, George.

Regularly for it. Just as deep as—oh, deep and lovely! I didn't know there was such a thing. There wasn't, not before. . . . Not just to speak to her? Not just to see her? Not if I promise faithfully not to say a single word about it, not even touch her finger? Not if I promise to cut and run at the very first sign of a change? Can't you manage that, sir? Am I such a rotten outcast as all that? It would be quite safe—I wouldn't say a word anybody couldn't hear—I'd promise—on my soul I'd promise——”

I had got up and begun to pace agitatedly back and forth. How could I have him at the Airds'—and yet how resist his supplication? How refuse what would have been my very heart's desire for him—yet how grant it to the ruin of her young life as well as of his? I felt his eyes on my face. He knew, the rascal, that he had moved me, and was greedily looking for the faintest hint of my yielding. Yet the impossibility! . . . I stopped before him.

“There's one thing that settles it if nothing else did,” I said gently. “Miss Aird's probably off in a couple of days.”

It was, of course, a flagrant invention. I had thought of it on the spur of the moment. But it could be made true if necessary, I thought. He stared at me blankly.

“Off! Did you say off?”

“Right away. And it's now nearly two o'clock, and I want you to make me a promise before I leave you.”

“Off!” he repeated stupidly, as if he had imagined her fixed for all eternity as he had seen her in that moment by the car.

“I'll bring your money round to-morrow at ten o'clock. I want you to promise to wait in your room for me till then.”

“Where is she going?”

“Will you wait in your room till I come?”

“Back to England?”

“I don't know. Will you wait for me in your room?”

“Tell me one other thing, sir,” he pleaded; “just her name——”

“Her name's Jennie.”

He received it as if it had been a costly gift. "Jennie, Jennie——" he breathed softly.

"You'll wait for me?"

"Of course, sir. Thank you, George."

"Then I'll say——"

But I could not get out the words "Good night."

How did I know what the night was going to be for him?

For it happened in the night. . . .

I left him standing by the earth-wall, with the lights still twinkling at sea and the low glare of Fréhel in the sky behind him. Four seconds, eleven seconds, four times a minute——

"Jennie!" I heard his hushed, rapt voice as I turned away.

## V

*"Le Por-r-rt! Le Por-r-rt!"*

Only an old woman with white streamers and a basket descended from the tram, but instinctively I turned my head to look at the flowery bank on which I had sat so few hours before. It was a sparkling morning, with an intense blue sky, high white clouds and singing larks. The fields of flowering sarrasin were white, cream, pink, deep russet; and far away the grey-green boschage receded into misty blue, unbroken by walls or fences, that contradictory communal undulation of a country where individualism is at its most intense, holdings small, and a ditch or a bank you could stride over fencing enough. But I was too anxious to be able to admire. At the best it looked as if I should have to assume complete responsibility for him and so cut my visit to the Airs abruptly short. At the worst—but I put the worst from me.

"Allez! Roulez!"

With the sound of a tank going into action the tram clattered forward to St Lunaire.

Up the steep street, and a swerve past the acres of tennis-courts that had once been grass. The huge six-acre cage

was already full of players, and I thought of Jennie Aird. Then past the magazins and the long café, with half-clad young Frenchmen punting a ball and walking on their hands in the strip of meadow opposite. The Casino, the hotels, and then a steep planted avenue that seemed to end in the air. Then a rush and another swerve, and out on to the wide expanse of tussocky links, grey and fawn sandhills, and turf gemmed with a myriad tiny flowers.

His hotel was within a biscuit's-toss of the terminus. It stood by the roadside, and its front consisted of a built-out structure of glass, within which a couple of Breton girls with tight hair, string-soled shoes, and the physique of middle-weight boxers, were laying a dozen small tables for *déjeuner*. A lad dressed precisely as Derry had been dressed was delivering lifebuoys of bread, and knives clattered in baskets, and two-foot-high stacks of coloured plates were being carried in.

"M'sieu' Arnaud?" I inquired of one of the string-slippered Amazons.

"M'sieu' n'est pas descendu—si vous voulez monter au deuxième, M'sieu'."

She indicated a way through the back salon that had once been the street frontage. Beyond yawned a cavernous kitchen, the blacker because of its opening on to a dazzlingly green back yard. Between the two rose a staircase, which a strapping youth was polishing with a mop on his foot. I mounted and gained the *deuxième*. Then, outside the closed door, I stopped with a thumping heart.

But it was no good hesitating. I pulled myself together and knocked.

"—*très!*" called a clear voice.

I thanked God, pushed and entered.

His head was bent over his colour-box. On a piece of paper he appeared to be making a list of the colours to be replenished. He looked smilingly up, and our eyes met.

Clear eyes, grave sweet mouth, undoubting smile——

And unchanged. The night had passed, and nothing perceptible had happened. I crossed to the window. Now

that all was well, I dare to admit to myself that I had been prepared to find him—dead. If he was right in fixing his climacteric at sixteen he might well have been dead.

But there he was, bending over his colour-box and murmuring “Cobalt—I seem to eat cobalt—raw sienna—orange vermilion——”

Presently I spoke, still from the window.

“Well, I don’t know anything about downstairs, but you’ve a gorgeous view up here.”

“Isn’t it?” he said. “Grows on you. At first I thought it rather scrappy, a little bit of everything, and I wish they’d put a bomb under that silly château-place; but it grows on you. Inland’s the country though. Orange vermilion, pale cadmium, and a double go of cobalt——”

I looked round his room. The smell of oil-colours clung about it, but it was exquisitely tidy and simple. Its walls were covered with a yellowish striped paper, its ceiling beams were moulded, its herring-boned parquet floor shone. A single mat lay by the side of his ornate wooden bedstead, which, with the little night cupboard by it, a small table at the window, and a single upholstered chair, was the only furniture in the room. The door-knob was of glass, and the lace curtains had been draped back over the open leaves of the window. From a flimsy little hat-rack hung his two haversacks. His canvases apparently were in the cupboard that was sunk into the wall.

“Well,” he said, putting his list of colours into his pocket, “it seems rather a rum idea bringing you right out here when I’ve got to go into Dinard myself. Can I have the money, George?”

I counted it out.

“And oh, by the way—I know you won’t mind—but if you’d talk French when there’s anybody about—it makes things a bit simpler——”

Here I began to be aware of the imminence of another problem. I don’t mean the talking French; I mean the whole problem of his company. He was going into Dinard to buy colours, and I also was returning to Dinard. The

natural thing was that we should go together. I could hardly constitute myself his guardian and not be seen about with him—bargain with him that he only came to me or I to him like Nicodemus, by night. He seemed to take all this cheerfully for granted.

But whither would it presently lead? Dinard was, in a word, the world—that world in which he had no place. Everybody knew scores of people in Dinard, and Madge Aird hundreds. Tennis, tea, the shops, the plage—all was public, familiar, open in the last degree. Within a couple of days, on the strength of being seen twice or thrice with me, he would be exchanging bows and smiles and “Bon-jours” with goodness knows who.

“Well, come along,” I said in a sort of daze. “But I don’t know that I feel like talking much, either in French or English. You’re a devil of a fellow for keeping your friends guessing, Monsieur Arnaud. You’re still Monsieur Arnaud, I suppose?”

“How can I change it?” he replied gravely.

Of course he couldn’t change it. Arnaud he must remain until he became too young to be Arnaud any longer.

On the returning tram I addressed myself somewhat as follows:

“George Coverham, this can’t go on. You’ve got to make up your mind one way or the other. If you don’t he’ll make it up for you. His is already made up. He sees no reason why he shouldn’t carry on. He’s either right or wrong. Well, suppose for a moment that he’s right? What then?”

“You know what you were prepared for when you went up those stairs of his. You know you had to put your hand up three times before you dared knock. Well, everything was all right; nothing had happened. If he’s really suddenly and desperately in love it ought to have happened, but anyway it didn’t. That means, in plain English, that he knows more about himself than you do.

“And he thinks he can stay as he is. Suppose he can? Suppose even that maddest conjecture of all is true, and that he actually may re-become normal and live out his life

like everybody else? It wouldn't be any more wonderful than the rest. So what's the obvious thing to do? Why, simply to take him as he is—as long as he is it. That's all he's asking you. And he's promised to clear out at the very first hint of another transformation. In fact he's got to. It's in the very nature of the case.

“Look at him on the seat opposite to you there, between those two bare-headed young women. Those two Breton girls may keep their four handsome Breton eyes straight before them, but they're conscious of every moment of his presence. Who wouldn't be? He's a dream of beauty. And remember how he pleaded with you last night. Can't you hear him still? ‘Only to see her, only to talk to her: can't you manage that, sir? Can't you, George?’ Was ever gratitude more touching and absurd than when you merely told him her name—‘Jennie!’ Why shouldn't he have the love now he missed before? Julia Oliphant didn't stop to think twice about it. Who made you Rhadamanthus, George Coverham? . . . Anyway, you've got to make up your mind.”

I told myself all this, and more; but I cannot say I convinced myself. Indeed, in the face of past experience, I made the mistake of once more thinking I had a choice in the matter. I thought that I possessed him, and not he me. So I floundered among details, little practical details, such as talking French to him and being seen about Dinard with him. I recalled how already Madge Aird had asked whether he had a brother. I seemed to see Alec's face when he was told that a Frenchman had fallen in love with his daughter, my own as I explained that the Frenchman was not really a Frenchman, and Alec's again as he asked me what the devil I meant. Then there was his name—Arnaud. That again landed us straight into a dilemma. He couldn't change it, must stop Arnaud; but as Arnaud the athlete he had been seen at Ambleteuse. The brother of some young Rugby or young Charterhouse at that moment in Dinard (the words seemed to detach themselves from the noisy babble of a tea-shop) had seen him. He might be recog-



nised here; people do look twice at a casual stranger who strolls into a Stade, chucks off his coat, and in his walking boots does something like level time. He looked it, too, every inch of him. . . . And whispers might be flying round Dover too. The straits are not very wide, and men who can swim them do not come down with every shower of rain. . . . Oh, the whole thing bristled with risks. I counted a hundred of them while the tram rolled in its cloud of filthy smoke past La Guériplais, La Fourberie, St Enogat, the Rue de la Gare. . . .

“Dévoiturons,” he said suddenly, touching my knee.

He had taken matters into his own hands even while I had mused. I had intended to postpone my decision by dropping off at St Enogat; now we were at the corner of the Boulevard Féart. “Down we get!” *We!* Apparently “we” could get to “our” colour shop without making the circuit of the rest of the town. I will not swear that I saw a momentary twinkle of mischief in his eyes. I was standing in the middle of the road looking after the tram, which was already fifty yards away.

Together a middle-aged English gentleman in a neat lounge suit and a splendid young specimen of French manhood in blouse and corduroys turned into the Boulevard Féart.

There would still have been time to retrieve my indecision. The Boulevard, approached from that end of the town, is not nearly so frequented as the Rue Levavasseur and the quarter near the Casino. It was, in fact, particularly quiet. But every step we took under the shady limes, past the white-façaded houses and gardens vermilion with geraniums and bluer than the sky with lobelia, brought us nearer to that crowded busy world in which he held so singular a place. Or I could have left him at the corner of the Rue Jacques Cartier and made my escape by way of the Rue St Enogat. But what then? If I shook him off to-day the question would be to face again to-morrow. . . . Ker Yvonne, Ker Maria, Ker Loïc . . . the shuttered villas slipped past us.

Then, "Derry," I said in desperation, "I'm at my wits' end about you. I haven't the faintest idea what I ought to do."

"It's jolly just being with you," he said, looking straight ahead.

"Yes. It's other people who're the difficulty."

I had the same answer as before. "As long as I sit tight, George?" he said mildly.

"Even then. You said yourself that you were both the most public and the most private man alive."

"Ah, but that was when I was slipping about all over the place.—Up here's our shop."

"But even if you're stationary you're just as much an anomaly. Nobody except you stops at one age."

"Well, it's a step in the right direction so to speak. At any rate it isn't going back."

"I wish I knew how you knew that."

"I wish I could tell you, old fellow," he placidly replied.

"Look here," I said abruptly. "There's just one possible way out, but I rather doubt whether you'd agree to it. I mean about what you wanted me to do last night. Would you allow me to tell the whole thing to my friends the Airds and leave the decision to them?"

Quickly, very quickly, he shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I couldn't do that."

"But is anything else fair and right?"

"If I stop as I am?"

"In any case."

"They wouldn't believe you."

"I think Mrs Aird might believe me."

He gave a short laugh. "She can swallow a good deal if she can swallow that!"

"She's a very observant woman. She said one thing that perhaps I ought to tell you."

"What?" he asked with sudden curiosity.

"She saw you one day in South Kensington."

"Well?"

"She'd also had a good look at you that day at the Lyonnese Club."

"Well?"

"She asked me whether Derwent Rose had a brother."

"Et vous avez répondu?"

"J'ai dit que non."

"C'était la figure? La taille?"

"Le tout ensemble."

"Elle avait des conjectures? Pas possible!"

"Comme vous le dites, pas possible; mais s'ils poussent sur le Rosier trop de boutons——"

"Il n'y-en poussera plus," he laughed; and the little knot of French people passed us by.

He made light of my recital. I heard his quiet chuckle. Then suddenly I realised that we were at the corner of the Rue Levassieur, outside the Hôtel de Provence.

"Look here, haven't we passed your shop?" I said.

"Eh? Have we? By Jove, so we have. That's the charm of your conversation, George."

"Then hadn't we better go back?"

"Of course we must; it's the only colour shop in the place. But just step across the road now that we are here. I want some tooth-powder. And some envelopes at the Bazaar there. Must have some—run right out yesterday."

We crossed to a chemist's, but it appeared that he usually went to a chemist's a little farther down the street. There he made his purchases, and once more we came out into the street.

"Now I want some bootlaces," he said. "You see, I always load up when I come into Dinard. Saves time, not to speak of the tram-fare."

It was approaching a brilliant midday, and from the Tennis Club, the shops, the confectioners, and the cafés, people were beginning to press to their various hotels and villas to lunch. In another half-hour the street would be half empty, but now it was at its gayest with bright blazers, gaudy costumes, sleek heads, sea-browned faces. One saw laughing,

turning heads, caught snatches of appointments—"A ce soir"—"Don't forget, Blanche"—"Number Four at two-thirty"—"You coming our way, Suzette?"

Suddenly my arm was seized, and M. Arnaud took a quick step forward.

"Thees ou-ay," he said laughingly, "des enveloppes——"

I was dragged into the Bazaar.

Then, but too late, I wondered what his so pressing need of envelopes was. "Must have some—ran right out yesterday!" Who were *his* correspondents? Of what did *his* letter-bag consist? Letters, he! A passport and a birth-certificate would have been more to the point; a *permis de séjour* and his Army Discharge Papers would have been more to the point. And most to the point of all was that the rascal had completely hoodwinked me.

For, standing there among hoops and grace-sticks, string shoes and cards of bijouterie, caoutchouc bathing-caps and all the one-franc-fifty fal-lals of the Bazaar, alone and for the moment with her back to us, was Jennie Aird.

## VI

This time if he wanted French he had it—off the ice.

"Touché—et merci, Monsieur. Bonjour."

I bowed, stepped forward, and placed myself between him and Jennie. I touched her elbow.

"I saw you come in. Are you nearly ready? We shall be late."

I was the angrier that it was with myself that I was chiefly angry. Jennie, giving me only the tail of her glance, turned to her choice of a bathing-cap again—the yellow one or the green one. My back was towards Rose, but I heard a saleswoman step up to him.

"Rien, merci—j'attends M'sieur," he said.

Jennie too heard, and turned.

There was no atmosphere of soft and factitious half-illumination now. This was the full blaze of a perfect

August midday, that flooded the shop with sunshine and made a dazzle of Jennie's little white hat with the cord about it, of the burnished hair beneath. The sleeves of her white frock were cut short above the dimple of her elbow, the tiny blue ribbon across her shoulders peeped through. She in her sunny white, he in black vareuse and corduroys brown as a wintry coppice, again stood looking one at the other.

And for the second time within the course of a sun I saw the world begin anew, as it begins anew for some he, for some she, with every moment that passes. For the beginning of the cradle is not the real beginning. That is only the end of the darkness of forebeing that is pierced with a woman's pang. That is still an uneasy slumber, yea, even though it weakly smile, and by and by stumble over its syllables, and stumble over its own uncertain feet, and walk, and spell, and use a tennis-racket. It is incomplete, and will never be complete in itself. It is completed in that moment when its eyes open on other eyes, and the wonder kindles there, and the ground underfoot is forgotten, and the surrounding sunlight is forgotten, and nothing is remembered except that those eyes have found their other-own eyes, and, though they lose them again in that same instant, never to see them again, will remember them in the hour when the shadow closes over all. That, that re-begins the cycle, is our real beginning. It was that which, in that tawdry Bazaar, turned the golden sunlight to a nimbus about us.

Again I touched her.

"The yellow one, is it? Let me put it in my pocket."

I had secured her arm. I picked up for her the horrible fifty-centime notes of her change. She had dropped her eyes, and her face was as rich-coloured as her lips, her lips a pulpy quiver. I felt the touch of Derry's hand on my sleeve, but I disregarded it. I felt bitterly towards him.

"Come along, my dear," I said; and I pushed her past him.

Yet if, as he had said, he wished merely to see her, merely

to speak with her, he had half his wish in that moment. Her left arm was in my right one, I between her and him. Suddenly, blush or no blush, she lifted her head. Behind me, she looked full at him. For two, three paces her head and shoulders continued to turn. I set my lips and looked straight ahead.

Then her head dropped again. Her teeth caught at her upper lip. For a moment she was a limp weight on my arm. We left the shop.

I saw his face at the window as we passed. Whether or not he stepped to the door to watch us out of sight I do not know.

I say that it was with myself that I was chiefly angry; but I have never found that a particularly mollifying reflection. As I have seen a man get rid of an undesired guest by blandly pressing him to stay but leading him gently by the arm all the time nearer to the door, so our young man had used me. I had been piloted here, there, in whichever direction he had wished. And as for Jennie's long backward look and turn of the head . . . well, it seemed to me that the thing might now be regarded as done. It did not need me to murmur "Jennie, this is M. Arnaud—Miss Aird." The back door into Alec Aird's jealously-guarded house was set ajar, and I, the only one who could have watched it, had failed to do so. I frowned, watching her white-clad feet moving on the sunny pavement. I avoided looking at her face. I knew that she equally avoided looking at mine.

Of one thing I was perfectly sure: she would not of her own accord speak of the young man we had just left. Perhaps it was that there are some things which, unless you out with them at once, become more and more difficult with every moment that passes. Many a close secret was not a secret at all in the beginning; it merely became one. Therefore she was already showing obstinacy. She knew that I knew about that look. She had looked openly, deliberately, as careless of my presence as if I had not been there. And in that critical moment it was a toss-up what my relations

with my friend's seventeen-years-old daughter were to be. She might, suddenly and swiftly, break into an emotional confession. On the other hand she might thenceforward bear me an unspoken grudge that I knew anything about her affairs at all.

I noticed that she carried no tennis racket. I therefore asked her, as we crossed the emptying Place du Commerce, whether she had left it at the Club.

"No," she said.

"Haven't you been playing this morning?"

"No."

"Too tired after the party last night?"

"No."

"I was wondering—but I suppose you've far more amusing things to do than to come for a walk with me this afternoon."

In those few words the whole situation trembled as in a balance. If she said Yes, much might follow; if No, then resentment would be my portion.

We continued to ascend the high-walled street, past tall garden gates and notice-boards—"A Vendre," "Locations," "Agence Boutin." We passed Beausejour, Primavera, Les Cyclamens. . . .

Then for the first time she looked sideways at me.

"I should like to," she said.

I was still angry with myself and him. He was probably right in refusing the only definite suggestion I had found to make, namely, that he should permit me to tell my host and hostess the whole story. But if his alternative was to lie in wait for her in the streets and shops of a French summer resort and to hang about the open windows of the house at night, I felt very strongly about it. He was going to be wily and masterful, was he? He, swaying on a tight-rope of time, was going to claim the treatment of a normal man? Well, that remained to be seen. The cold shoulder for a day or two might bring him to a more reasonable view. Anyway, after our encounter in the Bazaar, he could hardly pretend not to know my mind.

And yet (I asked myself as my anger began to wear itself out), who can know the mind of a man who does not know his own? More, when was anything that mattered ever settled by chop-logic of the sort that set my head spinning? Why, his brilliant beauty alone laughed to nothing all my attempts to get him off my mind. And suddenly my mind flashed back, back, it seemed interminable years back. There sprang up in my memory a lecture I had once attended at the Society of Arts, a cutting I had taken from an article in *The Times*.

"Human beings," said the article, "differ not only in the knowledge they have acquired, but in their dower of intelligence or natural ability. The latter has a maximum for each individual, attained early in life. Sixteen years has usually been taken as the age at which, even in those best endowed, the limit of intelligence has been reached."

Say that this was so; whither did it now lead?

A staggering vista to open before a middle-aged-to-elderly gentleman like myself, on his way to luncheon at a *riant* holiday villa with a moody and beautiful young creature of seventeen by his side!

For it seemed to me to lead like a ray straight into the blinding heart of the Sun of Life. The mind blinked in its attempt to follow it; I believe I actually passed my hand over my eyes as if to shut out a physical dazzling. I have said a little, a very little, about Derwent Rose's books; but how if they, foursquare and strongly-built as they were, were merely external things, well enough in their way, but clogged in the gross and unwieldy medium through which his central fire and power torturedly struggled? How if a more essential beauty should presently appear, free of these trammels of process, independent of acquirement and painful lore, dissociated from performance—shining, self-sufficient, its mere existence its own justification and law? "Every morning of my life," he had once said, "I've tried



to wake up as if that was the first day of the world." Was he now on the way to his fulfilment? Was that first morning actually about to dawn for him? Was an early sun about to rise on a creature *not* ready-made, *not* pre-instructed, unfettered by the prejudice of a single word, but man given to all understanding, man at the moment of his perfection, man liberated, and without a name or foothold in the human world?

A pretty speculation, I say, for a humdrum old gentleman going home to luncheon!

Luncheon over, I took a liqueur with Alec in the pergola. The lattice of shadow flecked the ascending smoke from his pipe.

"By the way, what became of you last night? You didn't go on to the Casino, did you?" he said.

"No. I took a walk."

"I heard you come in. The others had only just gone to bed. And of course Jennie was dog-tired and went upstairs with a headache."

"Well, she's coming for a walk with me this afternoon."

"Then for goodness' sake take her somewhere quiet. It isn't my idea of a holiday that you have to take a rest-cure after it."

I laughed. "I'll look after her. But when I'm with Jennie I like as many people as possible to see me with Jennie."

"Then tell her that and shake her out of herself, you old humbug. Hanged if I'd trust her with you if you were a few years younger."

"You'll have to trust her with somebody presently."

"Plenty of time for that yet," Alec grunted. "I've got my eye on it all right. . . . Well, if you're going out I'm going to have forty of the best. Watch me fade away——"

He proceeded to "fade away," while the shadows crept over the ascending smoke from his pipe on the table.

On this occasion, however, I was content to forego my pride in being seen with Jennie by my side. Just a quiet

cliff-path not too far away would do. There is much to be said for a quiet cliff-path when a young woman feels the first sweet trouble at her heart.

I left the completely faded-away Alec as I heard her step at the door of the house. She looked me straight in the eyes, as if it would be at my peril did I notice anything the matter with her own pebble-grey ones. We passed out, took the steep secluded lane towards the tea-cabin above St Enogat plage, and then descended the hewn steps to the shore. It is a tiny plage, remarkably steep, bordered with villas that resemble their own bathing-tents, and with a path that winds up the rocks beyond. We did not speak as we crossed the plage and began to climb.

Along that deeply indented coast you do a lot of walking for the distance forrarder you get, and also a good deal of up-and-down round rocky gulfs with the bottle-green water heaving lazily below. But over the seaward walls of villa and château peep valerian and fig, and the path is coral-sprinkled with pimperl and enamelled with convolvulus and borage and the hosts of smaller flowers. Away ahead the demi-tower of a sea-mark rose chalk-white against the deep blue, with the airy point of St Lunaire beyond. We approached a small field of marguerites, so eagerly open to the afternoon sun that at a short distance they were not white at all, but pale honey-yellow with the offering of their golden hearts. Poppies flamed among them, and the cigales crackled like ceaselessly-running insect machinery. From the cliff's foot came the lazy breaking of the waves. That, I thought, was quite a pleasant place. Even Alec would have approved of it. We sat down between the staring marguerites and the sea.

I do not wish to speak of Jennie in a fatherly or avuncular manner. One had better not have been born than not be simple with the heart of a young girl. At the faintest trace of a smile it will close against you for ever, and wonder follows wonder so quickly over it that it will be a long time before you get your second chance. So do not tell it that it will think differently about things to-morrow.

It is you who will think differently to-morrow if you do. I say in all sincerity that, in that long pause between my asking Jennie to come for a walk with me and her acceptance, I had felt a suspense as real as any I ever felt. If that pivotal moment on which the oncoming generation turns is not to be gravely considered, I know of no other moment that need greatly trouble us.

So I listened to the treble of the cigales and the soft deep bass of the sea, and the silence continued between us. She picked and nibbled florets of clover, her eyes far away. Her gaze wandered to butterflies, to a lizard that disappeared with a glint of bronze into a cranny, to a ladybird that alighted on her forearm.

Then the largest tear I have ever seen brimmed, trickled and dropped.

On leaving the house she had dared me to notice anything about her eyes; but it is another matter when a tear so engulfs a ladybird that it is a question whether the creature's pretty wing-cases will ever be the same again. I had to speak after that.

"Cheer up, Jennie," I said softly.

She gulped. "Why were you so horrid and cross with him!"

"This morning in the shop?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . I fancied he'd played me rather a mean trick."

"He didn't!" she flashed. "I'm sure he wouldn't do anything mean!"

"Then say a trick I didn't expect from him."

"I heard him tell the woman in the shop he was waiting for you, and—and you walked straight past him without looking at him!"

"It might have been better if you'd done the same, Jennie."

"Did he come to fetch you out last night?"

"I took him out."

"Is he the—the Monsieur Arnaud the maid meant?"

"That's the name he goes by."

"Isn't it his name?"

"I suppose it is."

"Then why do you say it like that? . . . I want you to tell me about him, Uncle George, please," she ordered me.

I too wanted to do that; but I found it anything but simple. I might have told her that he was simply a vagrant, just a fellow who wandered about sketching, here to-day and gone to-morrow. That would have been perfectly true. But it would have been equally untrue. That was no picture of Derry. She had seen a far, far truer picture of him when she had turned her head towards him in the toy-shop.

"Well, of course that *is* why I asked you to come for a walk this afternoon, Jennie," I said slowly. "As a matter of fact M'sieur Arnaud's had a very curious experience that I can't very well tell you about. The result of this is that he's—a rather odd sort of person to know. In fact he's better not known. He wanted me to introduce him to your mother, and I told him I'd rather not do so. Anyway he's going away soon."

"That doesn't sound like a horrid sort of person," she commented. "Is that why he came last night—to be introduced to mother?"

"No, he came for something quite different last night."

"What?"

Here again I might have answered with a certain appearance of truth that he had come for money, though it was his own money; but that too would be to misrepresent him. The cigales crackled loudly. I suppose the ladybird was all right again, for it was nowhere to be seen. I mused, and then turned to her.

"You said yesterday that you wished you were back in England, Jennie," I said. "How would you like to come and stay with me in Surrey for a bit?"

"No thank you, Uncle George. Thank you very much."

"It's quite jolly there in its way, and I dare say I could get somebody quite nice to be with you."

"I should like to some day, of course," she said, "but not

just now, if you don't think it horrid of me." And she added, "I love being here."

"Since yesterday?"

She did not reply.

Of course I had not expected for a moment that she would say Yes, even had I made up my own mind to abandon Derry to his fate, which I had not done. Yet a thought flashed into my mind. Were I to return to England, taking Jennie with me, Derry would still not be unlooked-after. The moment I left, Julia Oliphant, I felt certain, would fly to his side. And if Jennie would not come with me, what would the impossible combination be then? . . . My half-formed thought became a sudden picture, a contrast, vivid and arresting, between two women—the one who experimented with her dress and wanted to know what a cocktail tasted like, the other this fragrant hawthorn-bough by my side. And between the two rose his grave and sunbrowned face. . . .

I stared at my picture, fascinated. The three of them together! Exquisite and horrible complication! Suppose it should ever come to that!

Then the picture vanished, and I saw the translucent un-twinkling sea. The roofs of distant St Lunaire made a pale cluster of brightness. The wind rippled the edges of the satiny poppies.

All at once she clutched my sleeve with both her hands and buried her face against it. It broke, the storm that had been pent up for nearly twenty hours. As the marguerites exposed their yearning golden hearts, so she kept nothing back, laid bare her own heart to the sun that was its lord.

"Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do! I can't bear it; it's too—too—oh, tell me what to do, Uncle George! I know he's my darling! I don't want to live without him! If he goes away I don't know what will happen! It's all since yesterday—I didn't sleep a wink—I went out into the garden when they'd all gone and stood in the same place. Then I heard father moving about and hid. . . . And then this

morning when you were horrid to him—no, you weren't horrid, dear Uncle George—I know it's all a stupid mistake—I love him! I don't care if he doesn't speak a word of English. I want him here now! I want to be with him! Please, please introduce him to mother. She loves French people. And he did ask you to, so he can't be horrid. I'm sure he didn't mean to play you a mean trick. There must be a mistake. I'm sure he can explain if you'll let him. Dear, dear Uncle George—do, do!"

I put my hand on her hat, which was as much of her as I could see.

"Don't look at me, please—I don't want to move for just a minute."

"As long as you like, my dear."

"Oh, I'll do anything if you only will! Where is he staying? I never saw him in Dinard before. Where is he staying? Does he live here all the time? I could see him if you came too, couldn't I? And I don't care what sort of clothes he wears . . . do, do, Uncle George!"

Then she straightened herself, and looked full at me through her flooded eyes. She was suddenly imperious.

"Now tell me something else, please. When you went off with him last night. Did he say anything about me?"

Perhaps I did not lie with sufficient promptitude. "About you? No, of course not."

She looked accusingly at me; she caught her breath.

"Oh, how *can* you say that! I don't believe it! He did!"

"But he couldn't even see you in the dark!"

"It wasn't dark—it wasn't a *bit* dark—it was quite light enough to see anybody—you saw him——"

"Well, he's going away, and there's an end of it."

Like a rainbow was the light that woke in her lately showering eyes. Up went the soft lip, out peeped the pearls. Back, back from their golden hearts lay the petals of the marguerites.

"If," she said with extreme slowness, "if he told you he was going away, that must have been last night."

I was dumb. I saw her effort to close her inner eyes on

the light that broke on them, lest a wonder on a wonder should prove more than she could bear.

“That was *last night!*” the triumphant words rang out.

I suppose there is no such thing as one half of a miracle without the other——

“That was *last night*, and there hadn’t *been* a this morning then, and he hadn’t seen me when I was buying my bathing-cap, and if he said he was going away he’s changed his mind and he isn’t going away at all! Neither of us is going away! Oh-h-h!” (That “Oh” echoes in my heart still.) “He isn’t even thinking of going now! Because we both know now—we knew in the shop—and he loves me too!”

Just to see one another—just to speak to one another—that was all they asked of me.





PART II  
THE EVEN KEEL



# 1

That evening I sat in Ker Annic, alone. Alec and Madge had gone out for an after-dinner walk, taking a silent Jennie with them. Silent too had been our return along the cliff-tops that afternoon. Whether she already regretted having opened her heart to me I could not tell.

I sat at the open window of the salon, looking out over the sea that showed pale milky green against the heavy sunset bank. Inside the room Ganymede and the Eagle had been lighted, and my shadow streamed down the steps and was lost in the darkening garden. It was not a cold evening, and yet I felt a little cold. No fire was laid behind the drawn-down iron shutter where Alec threw his crumpled tobacco packets, and it was hardly worth while troubling a maid. I closed the window, crossed to the shuttered fireplace, and sat down in a striped tapestried chair.

What had become of my illusion that certain things could not exist in this clear atmosphere of Northern France? No man with two memories bathe in that milky green sea I had just shut out? But he had sworn it. No man of forty-five masquerade as a quarter of a century younger in this broomy, thymy air? But here he was. . . . I looked round the little salon, as if its spurious gaiety had misled me. Across the varnished ceiling the lamp-chains threw straggling spider's webs of shadow. In one gilt oval mirror a corner of the lamp was duplicated, in another re-duplicated. Everywhere were bits of inessential decoration, the trophy of Senegalese spears over the door, the fringed and fretted bracket with nothing on it, a bronze fingerplate, a bit of lace or coloured glass, all the rest of the quick artifice with which that great nation diverts attention from its naked purpose in life—to wring from everything the last benefit

the occasion will yield. Or so at any rate it seemed to me that night, as my eyes rested on the wriggling gilt ribbons of the mirrors and Ganymede struggling in the Eagle's clutch.

When Alec Aird had greeted me on Dinard Cale he had glanced at the two suit-cases I had thrown ashore and asked me whether that was all the gear I had brought with me. And it is true that one cannot stay many weeks in a place on the resources of two suit-cases. But the length or shortness of my stay was now only part of a wider issue. The question was, not how long I was to stay, but how I was ever going to leave until Derry was ready to come with me. Was he likely to come now? Would anything drag him away? Hardly! Jennie was perfectly right: "He isn't even thinking of leaving, because we both know now—we knew in the shop—and he loves me too!"

A pretty kettle of fish, I reflected, looking at the empty brackets and the spears over the doorway. . . .

For it was all very well to talk about only seeing one another, only speaking to one another. How long was that likely to last? How long had it lasted Julia Oliphant? Just as long as it had taken her to help herself to more. True, Julia was not a sleeping, but a particularly wide-awake beauty. Julia was not Jennie. For the glimmers of starlight that Julia had formerly brought into his life Jennie had now given him the sun itself. Both had known it in that long exchange of eyes in the Dinard Bazaar that morning.

Therefore I feared that, while Julia had produced in him an aberration grave enough but still only of the second magnitude, Jennie might now unwittingly bring about a cataclysm indeed. For he himself had said that his chances of stability lay in an even and unexciting tenor of life. He must sail, so to speak, on an even keel. Calmly and equably he must pick his way through this beautiful and passionate wonder. He must lash the wheel of his will lest the lightest of her sighs should drive him rail-under. A glance might mean the loss of years to him, a kiss death. . . . Others

than I have told of loves between two normal creatures, if such in love there be. I am the first, since a mortal fell in love with a god, to tell of lovers whose lives met as they approached each other from opposite directions.

Yet—only to see one another, only to speak to one another! Who with a heart could refuse them that? Who, only looking at them, he serious and radiant, she as I had seen her among the marguerites that afternoon? Love was first invented for such as they. Could he but have slept, like Endymion, in his loveliness for ever! . . . You see what had already become of my momentary anger against him. It was quite, quite gone. He was once more my son, outside whose door I had paused with a sick dread that very morning.

And as love of him re-possessed me the marvel grew that he should so have survived that shock of beauty and emotion that had been his where the cars had stood parked in the transparent gloom. "Who was that with you in the garden, George?" his ardent whisper seemed to sound again. Was it possible that there were *two* loves, the one shattering, ruinous, destructive of the few years of his life, but the other full of security, healing and rest? Was there indeed a Love Sacred and a Love Profane? (Yet who would call Julia Oliphant's love for him profane? He himself, since he had always refused it? Surely none other.) And I remembered his own halting surmises as to the origin of his singular fate. He had known heaven and hell—had "been too close to the balm or the other thing." God (he had said) was more than a gland; not a knock on the head in the war, but the contending angels themselves of Good and Evil had brought him to this. The one principle had fetched down his years all clattering about him on that moonlit night when the cracking of a cone on my balcony had brought me out of my bed. Was the opposite principle now about to expunge that other ill, to restore him, and to make him a whole and forward-living man again? He believed that there was a chance of it. Was it too utterly beyond belief after all?

Did it prove to be true, then all was heavenly clear. His new life would be what we all sigh that our lives were not—no blind groping in the night of ignorance and doubt, but the angelic victory over the hosts of darkness. He was nineteen and unburdened of his sin, she seventeen and sinless. They would marry. One marriage such as theirs might at the last be enough to rehabilitate the despairing world. Instead of being in his own person a public peril he might be society's hope and stay.

And—I found my excitement quickening—so far all was well. "*Entrez!*" the bright voice that might have been silent for ever had called, and I had entered to find him humming over a paint-box.

Surely he knew about himself if anybody did——

And he thought he could keep on an even keel——

There broke in on my musing the sudden sound of voices. The Airs were returning from their walk. Madge tapped at the window, the catch of which I had turned, and she and Alec entered. Jennie walked straight past, and I heard her step in the hall, then on the stairs. Apparently she was going straight to bed.

"Then if he's English what the devil does he wear those clothes for?" Alec demanded as he closed the window again.

"*Mon ami*, as he hasn't consulted me about his clothes I don't know."

"Where did Jennie pick him up?"

"Don't speak as if he was a germ. And do make a *tee-ny* effort to be a little less insular, my dear. 'When the Lord said all men He included me.'"

"We aren't in heaven. We're in Dinard."

"Among the world, the flesh and the French," said Madge cheerfully. "Why shouldn't he speak good French instead of your eternal '*Donnez-moi*' and '*Combien*'? Why shouldn't a thing mean something simply because it isn't in English? You'd better go home and go to Lords'. . . . George, you've been asleep!"

If I had I was very far from being asleep now. If my ears told me truly, since leaving Ker Annic the Airs had

met, and had spoken to, Derwent Rose. Alec crossed to the fireplace, lifted the shutter, knocked out his pipe, and took up the running again.

"And what on earth made Jennie speak to him in French?"

"Jennie's quite right to practise her French."

"You don't practise French on a fellow who says he's an Englishman—porter's blouse or no porter's blouse. I can hardly imagine she spoke to him without knowing something about him."

"As you and I were there, very likely not," said Madge dryly.

"Anyway I marched Jennie on ahead," Alec growled. "Confounded mixed foreign company—wish we'd never come here——"

"I," said Madge serenely, "found him entirely and altogether charming, as well as being one of the handsomest boys I've ever seen. And he's coming to have tea with me. . . . This, George," she turned to me, "is a friend of Jennie's we met while we were out. He'd been making a sketch of the sunset and was just packing up, so we walked along together. Oh yes, I know—I ought to be ashamed at my time of life—but he's the most adorable creature! A good deal like your Derwent Rose to look at—very like him, in fact—though of course the Bear's old enough to be his father. And listen to Alec, just because he was dressed as half the English and American students in Paris are dressed! I don't know whether Jennie's fallen in love with him, but *I* have!"

"And if he's English what's he called Arnaud for?" Alec demanded with renewed suspicion.

"Dear but simple husband, possibly he had a French father. Such things have been heard of, even in that Rough Island's Story of yours. If you'll make me out a list of the questions you want asked I'll get it all out of him when he comes to tea. In the meantime—unless George would like to take me on the Casino for an hour—I think I shall go to bed. Feel like a modest flutter, George?"

I shook my head.

"Then bed. I'll dream I won a lot of money. Unless I dream of young Arnaud. Don't let Alec fall asleep in his chair. *Dors bien*—"

She tripped out under the trophy of assegaïs.

I was hardly five minutes behind her. Slowly I ascended to my room, crossed to the window, and leaned out over the balcony.

So that was that. Simply, and without any fuss at all, his foot was in the door of Ker Annic. The whole thing had taken almost exactly twenty-four hours. In the space of two revolutions of the clock, he, from the lurking-place of his roadside hotel at St Briac, had contrived to get himself asked to the house to tea. I wondered what he would do about myself. Would he blandly bow, as if our acquaintance began at that moment, or would he advance with outstretched hand, own up to it, and act on the square? If he admitted his acquaintance with me, what questions of Alec's should I not have to answer? How answer them, how explain my concealment? How accept any responsibility whatever for him? Yet how avoid complete responsibility? Apparently only Jennie and the maid who had announced him knew of his furtive visit to myself the evening before; but Jennie knew, and what more she might learn when they put their heads together I could not guess. Perhaps little or nothing. Perhaps all. . . .

My thoughts flew to Jennie again and the miracle of the past twenty-four hours for her. The first awakening look of that moment by the cars, the lovely and irreparable surrender in the Dinard Bazaar, her sobs against my shoulder that afternoon, the radiant burst in which she had realised that he too loved her—and then that evening's encounter whatever it had been, when apparently she had taken matters into her own hands, bowed to him, and spoken her first words to him in French, to be answered in English. . . . No wonder she could not yet realise it. The day before had found her a child, moody, wilful, not knowing what ailed her, but crying to Life to take her, use her and not spare her; now she was a woman, with a strange sweet turmoil



in her bosom, and a quite matter-of-fact resolution in the brain beneath that red-gold hair. No need to ask whether she slept! Sleep, with that ache and bliss at war in her breast? She must be awake at that moment, wondering whether he was awake, knowing that he was awake, lying in her innocent bed with her face turned towards St Briac. His miniature was painted on the curtains of her closed but unsleeping eyes, the echo of his voice was in her ears as she had spoken to him in French, and he had answered—in English.

And by the way, *why* had he answered her in English? Only that morning he had cajoled me into talking French, at any rate among French people. Had he too, stupefied with bliss, answered her instinctively in her own native tongue and his? Or had he deliberately resolved that here at any rate should be no trick or stratagem to be subsequently explained, but a perfectly clean beginning? If so, how would he contrive to maintain it? How could he be secure that the contretemps of any single moment of the day would not catch him out? I remembered the masterfulness and skill with which he had managed me; had he his plans for the handling of the Airs also? Were they to be founded on the appearance of complete honesty, with only the trifling fact suppressed that he had lived a whole life before?

If that was the idea, I could only catch my breath at the impudence and daring and pure cheek of it. Look at its comic beauties! Months before, Madge had begged me to bring the author of *The Hands of Esau* to see her; well, here was that author coming—as a corduroyed young landscape-painter about whose nationality there seemed to be some ambiguity! That afternoon at the Lyonnaise Club she had admired him for the beauty of the prime of his manhood; and as a stripling youth his beauty had again engaged her eye! Suppose one of the books of Derwent Rose should happen to be mentioned; would he say “Ah yes, I’ve read that,” and quote a page of it? Suppose she should say that he was rather like a man she had met in

Queen's Gate who was rather like Derwent Rose; would he say "Naturally, Mrs Aird, since I am the same man"? Or would he suppress even the twinkle of his eye and continue his leg-pulling? The thing began to teem with quite fascinating possibilities, and in a couple of days, in his French clothes or his English ones, he would be upon us. Within a week he might be painting Jennie's portrait, as Julia Oliphant was supposed to be painting my own.

And where were young Rugby, young Charterhouse, now that he had appeared on the scene?

Suddenly, on the little balcony at Ker Annic that night, with the Plough over the sea and the lamplight from the salon below yellowing the garden, I found myself one tingle of hope that he might pull it off.

## II

You will appreciate my growing excitement when I tell you of a resolve I took. It would have been perfectly simple for me to take the first tram out to St Briac, to see him at his hotel, to tell him I was aware of the turn events had been made to take, and to ask him to be good enough to tell me where I came in among it all. But I found myself vowing that I would be hanged first. It was his show, and for the present at any rate he should run it without any interference from me. If when he came to tea at Ker Annic he chose to call me George, well, we would see what happened; if he solemnly stood waiting to be introduced to me, that was his affair. At the least it would be interesting. It might prove enthralling.

Therefore I did not seek him the next day, but crossed to St Malo with Alec and went for a potter about the quays of St Servan.

I learned later that I should not have found him at St Briac even had I sought him there. He, who had so lately avoided the eyes of men, now coolly came forth and took his place in the world. His bicycle, instead of taking him

and his painting-gear to Pleudihen or Ploubalay or the war-ravaged woods of Pontual, brought him into Dinard early in the forenoon. In the afternoon it brought him in again. It would probably have brought him in again in the evening had there been the faintest chance of a glimpse of Jennie Aird. It was on the afternoon trip that Madge met him, and when we returned from St Servan Alec and I were told that Monsieur Arnaud was asked to tea the next day.

"Are you deliberately throwing him at that child's head?" Alec asked crossly.

"I'm adding him to my collection of nice people. I should be so much obliged if you happened to go to the Club, dear. Not that you're in the least like a wet blanket, darling. Only the thermometer drops just the least little bit."

"It'll go up again all right if I see any reason for it," Alec promised. "You know nothing about the fellow. He may be all right for all I know, but as a matter of principle——"

Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Alec on matters of principle takes time to run down. At the end he turned his head to find that Madge had left the room. And that is enough to annoy anybody.

Something that I overheard on my way to my room the following afternoon caused me to smile. The door of Madge's room stood ajar, and as I passed it Jennie's imploring voice came from within.

"Oh, mother, not *that* old thing! *Do* wear the putty colour!"

"What!" in a faint shriek. "My very newest new one!"

"Please, mother!"

"But I was keeping that specially for——"

"Ple-e-ase! And the little darling hat!"

"But——"

"*Please, please!*"

I passed on. Evidently the best there was was none too good for Monsieur Arnaud, alias Arnold, alias Derwent Rose.

Tea was set out inside the pergola; Jennie herself placed

little leaves round the sandwiches, begonia petals about the dishes of chocolate and nougat. Critically she paraded her mother's putty-coloured frock for inspection, touched the little darling hat deftly. She herself wore her pale gold silk jumper; her proud throat and small head issued from it like the little porcelain busts in the shop in the Rue Levassieur—the Watteaus and Chardins and Fragonards that are made up into pincushions and cosies. She was a tremulous tender pout of anticipation and anxiety. A dozen times she moved the objects on the table, a dozen times moved them back again. Alec had dissociated himself from all this absurd fuss about a chance-met English youth with a French name, but he sat not far away, in the shade of the auracaria, behind the *Paris Daily Mail*.

Then, at four o'clock, there was the short soft slide of somebody alighting from a bicycle, and Derry stood by the wrought-iron gate, looking about him.

"This way—come straight down!" Madge called. "The bicycle will be all right there."

Rapidly as I knew Jennie's heart to be beating, I was hardly less excited myself. Now what was he going to do?

What he did was the simplest thing imaginable. As he advanced among the montbretias and begonias I noticed that he wore his English clothes. He took Madge's hand; he smiled simply at Jennie; and then, as Madge was about to present him to myself, he smiled and shook hands with me too.

"That's all right—we do know one another," he said. "Quite a long time. In London, eh, sir? And, as a matter of fact, I came here to see him the other night, but you were all so busy with the party——"

Beautifully, calmly disarming. He said it, too, just as Alec came up—for Alec may growl before his guests come, and growl again when they have gone, but he is their host as long as they are there. If Monsieur Arnaud had known Sir George Coverham in London the situation was more or less regularised. The growling might continue, but in a

diminuendo. Growling is sometimes a man's duty to his own face.

"Well, let's have tea anyway," Alec said. "Tell them, Jennie."

The dark blue clothes—that had crossed the Channel in a motor-launch while their owner, thickly greased, had swum alongside in the night—fitted him quite passably well; I remembered the very suit. His boots and collar, however, were French, and apparently he had no English hat, for his head was uncovered. I remember a foolish fleeting wonder that the light chequer of shadow should pattern his clear and self-possessed face exactly as it did our own—and he the *lusus naturæ* he was! He stood there, modest and at ease, waiting for his seniors to seat themselves. I saw Alec's expert glance at his perfect build. I mentally gave the subject of athletics about ten minutes in which to crop up.

"Do sit down," said Madge; and she added to me, "George, you never told me you knew Mr Arnaud in London!"

"I think this is the first time we've all been together," I parried.

Derry gave me a demure glance. "Oh yes. And I stayed a week-end in Sir George's place not so long ago—had a jolly swim in his pond—isn't that so, sir?"

He should at any rate have a tweak in return. "When there's a prep school in the neighbourhood a good many young people use a man's pond," I observed; and at that moment Jennie and a maid arrived with tea.

Already I fancied I had what is called a "line" on him. The only word I can apply to his modest impudence is "neck"—charming, bashful, but quite deliberate "neck." He had not merely met me before in London; oh dear no; he went a good deal beyond that. He was a young man I had to stay in my house, allowed to swim in my pond. I saw the way already paved for as many visits to Ker Annic as he pleased. I saw in anticipation Alec coming round to his English clothes, his grace and strength of build. Madge

he already had in his pocket. He even admitted having sought me at this very house a night or two before! My position was as neatly turned as heart could wish. I could not even imitate his own mendacious candour lest I should give him and myself completely away. Yes, I think "neck" is the word.

He talked quietly, charmingly, not too much. Jennie hardly ventured to look at him, nor he at her. To Madge he was the most perfect of squires. Alec, like myself, was "sir" to him.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that's quite right. I did do a bit of a sprint at Ambleuse. I'm that Arnaud. But I've had to knock it off. You wouldn't think it to look at me, but I've got to go awfully steady. I used to be quite fast, but that's some time ago. And of course I shall be all right again in a little time. That's one of the reasons I took up painting. It keeps me in the air practically all the time."

"Chest?" said Alec.

"Something of the sort, sir. No thank you, I don't smoke."

But for one significant trifle I think Alec might have been more or less satisfied. This was the fact that, in his own hearing, his daughter had spoken to this charming stranger in French, and had been answered in English. It might mean little or nothing, but I saw that it stuck in his mind. In his different way Alec is no less quick than his wife. Let him down once and you are likely to have to take the consequences for all time. A trifle ceases to be a trifle when it is all there is. Alec knew nothing of his visitor, but he did know that Jennie never addressed the blazered tennis-playing English youths in French. He also knew that for three days Jennie, who up to then had soaked herself in tennis, had not been near the nets at all. The intensely insular father of a beautiful girl of seventeen is not blind to these things.

"I suppose your people were French at one time?" Alec said presently, not too pointedly.

"Yes, sir," said Derry, for all I knew with perfect truth.

"My mother was a Treherne, a Somerset woman. I believe she and my father ran away. I don't remember him."

"And you went to a French school?"

"No, sir. Shrewsbury." This, too, was perfectly true.

"You've got an uncommonly good French accent, that's all," remarked Alec; and relapsed into silence.

After all, the last question he would have thought of asking his young guest was whether he might have a look at his birth certificate.

Up to this point our gathering had had its distinctly amusing side. With consummate dissembling he had turned us round his finger, and it would have taken a conjurer to guess that he was softly laughing at all of us except Jennie. But the more I considered the "line" I had on his subtle machinations the less a laughing matter it all became. Behind the gentle deference of his manner I felt the grimmest determination. His charm was the charm of a charming youth, but it rested on the hard experience and resolution of a man. And behind that again in the last resort menace would lie. This man, actually older than Madge, not much younger than Alec and myself, and a full quarter of a century older than Jennie, had toiled for fame and had missed the fruits of it; he had chased the will-o'-the-wisp pleasure and had floundered in the bog; but now he had seen the shining thing beside which fame and pleasure are nothing at all. To seize that was now the whole intention of his marvellous twice-lived life. Let him keep his eyes as he would from looking directly at Jennie, Jennie was there, the prize for which he strove. And I knew in my soul that were I or another to try to frustrate him we had better look to ourselves. It was a thing none the less to beware of that his brow was smooth, his eyes bright, his skin clear as the skin of a boy.

And all in a moment I found myself looking at him with—I don't know how else to express it—a sort of induced unfamiliarity. All the strangeness of it came over me again like a wave. I knew that I didn't know him in the least. Behind that mask he knew infinitely more about me than I

knew about him. He sat with his back to the sea, and the tartan of tricky shadow laced his brow, was lost again as his face dipped, reappeared on the navy-blue sleeve and his brown hand on the table. Yes, completely a stranger to me. I his father? He was his own father. What else did all that turgid stuff in *The Times* about "maximum faculties" mean? New words for old things! "The boy is father of the man." They of old time knew it all before us. We only think it is truer to-day because more people talk about it. Here, incipient and scarcely veiled, was the real parent of the Derwent Rose of *The Vicarage of Bray, An Ape in Hell*, and all else he had ever done. Here, implicitly and in embryo, were the wit of the *Vicarage*, the patient purpose of *Esau*, and the deadly suppressed anger of the *Ape*. Possibly you have never seen, brightly and sunnily displayed with a light and laughing lazy-tongs of rippling shadow, the authentic beginning of a man you have known twenty-five years farther on in time. Perhaps it is as well that they who have seen it are few. You may take my word for it that that family tree of which the roots are Arnaud and the blossoms Rose can be a rather terrifying thing.

Therefore I and I alone was able to pierce through his blandness, and to see the tremendousness of the effort behind it all; and I wondered whether *that* was his idea of an easy and unexciting life! Whatever it was to him, I can only say that I did not find it so. I almost sweated to see his composure. Yet to all outward appearance he never turned a hair. His keel was still even, the rudder of his will under perfect control. Jennie with the downcast eyes was the mark on which he steered. And his own eyes sought the rest of us in turn with crafty innocence and infernal candour.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" he was saying to Alec. "Oh"—he gave a little laugh of confusion—"in a place like this it's sometimes difficult to say! Where was it, Miss Aird?" (But he gave her no chance to reply.) "One hardly knows how one meets anybody else; it seems to be in the air; you can hardly help knowing people. But these holiday acquaintances can be easily dropped afterwards."



("Steady, Derry!" I found myself commenting. "Don't overdo it—that's rather experienced—don't be too wise for the age you look.")

"Anyway," he went on, "I shall probably be the last one here. I like the place, and the rate of exchange is all to the good when you know your way about—not in a villa," he twinkled modestly. "They say Italy's the place, but I can't quite manage that, and England doesn't suit me, so I shall just stick on here and paint."

"I've only seen the sketch you were doing the other night," remarked Madge—dangerously invitingly, I thought.

"Oh, they aren't anything." He waved them aside. "I hope to do something one day. But it's a funny thing," he explained, "words and books and all that sort of thing never interested me in the least. I couldn't write if my life depended on it; can't imagine how Mrs Aird and Sir George do it. But everybody understands what they see with their eyes. Paint's the stuff."

"Then when are you going to show us?" said Madge.

"If you'd care to, of course. George—Sir George Coverham knows where I hang out. Perhaps you'd bring Mrs Aird round, sir? . . . Ah——"

The last little exclamation accompanied as wonderful a feat of its kind as I ever saw. As she had turned to him Madge's elbow had caught a teaspoon, which slipped over the table's edge. But it never reached the ground. He did not even shake the table. The position of his shoulder altered, his hand shot out. He put the spoon back on the table. With such instantaneous smoothness had he done it that it seemed simple. But I tell you I caught my breath. . . .

"Near thing," he smiled. "Oh, come any time. You won't have to mind a few stairs. But I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. I'm only a beginner really."

And so not one door, but two were opened, the second one at his lodging at St Briac.

But Alec as well as I had seen that marvellous piece of fielding with the teaspoon. Suddenly he got up, stretched himself, and walked away.

The moment his back was turned Jennie spoke for the first time.

"Perhaps Mr Arnaud would like to see the rest of the garden, mother?"

"Then show him, child," said Madge. "We'll be with you in a minute."

Their eyes met. He rose. They went off together. Madge swung round on me.

"Why didn't you say you knew him before?" she demanded.

"The question never arose."

"The question always arises if Alec's anywhere about. You know he's like a bear with a sore head about young men."

"It's the duty of a father's head to be sore. I quite agree with Alec."

"But if you'd only said 'He's quite all right, he stays with me in Haslemere——'"

"Quite a number of people stay with me in Haslemere, if that's a social guarantee——"

"You know what I mean. Alec's simply a troglodyte. He doesn't belong to to-day. It's all very flattering, of course, but he simply can't forget what things were like when I was a girl. They never dreamed of letting us travel without a maid; why, we actually had to sit still in the carriage till the footman had opened our own front door. Alec doesn't realise that the world's moved on since then. And you could have put it all on a proper footing with three words!"

"'It?'"

"Yes, his coming here. All that fuss! I think he's perfectly delightful. And I know those Somerset Trehernes if they're the Edward Trehernes of Witton Regis. And I expect his painting's clever too. He looks as if he had all the gifts. . . . Now I make you answerable for Alec, George. That he's not simply stupid and unreasonable, I mean. I don't mean that he's not perfectly right to ask the

usual questions, but Jennie's got to be considered too. She's quite old enough to know her own mind. Now I'm going to them. Are you coming?"

"I'll come along in a few minutes," I replied.

### III

My intelligence with regard to painting is simply that of the ordinary man. I seldom speculate on the relation between one art and another. True, I have read my Browning, and have wondered whether he really knew what he was talking about when he spoke of a man "finding himself" in one medium, and starting again all unprejudiced and anew in another. It sounds rather of a piece with much more art talk we heard when we were young.

But Derwent Rose was only fallaciously young. He had time at his disposal in a sense that neither Browning nor you nor I ever had. And it seemed to me significant of the state of his memory that he should have turned his back on words and taken up paint instead. For the burden of his age was lifted from him, and he was advancing on his youth with a high and exhilarating sense of adventure. Now words had been the greatest concern of his "A," or Age Memory, and words, it must be admitted, have arrogated to themselves the lion's share of this strange faculty that we call remembering. Had he now found a means of expression more closely in correspondence with the untrodden ground ahead? In other words, was he a kind of alembical meeting-ground where the arts interpenetrated and became transmuted? . . . I hazard it merely as a conjecture in passing, and leave you to judge. Let us pass to that visit we paid to St Briac to see his sketches.

Alec was not with us. The Kings, Queens and Knives of the bridge-table were pictures enough for him. So I accompanied Madge and Jennie. Jennie's bosom lifted as we approached the wide spaces of the links—but then the

St Briac air is admittedly fresher than the tepid medium that is canalised, so to speak, in the streets and lanes of Dinard. It was afternoon, and the shed at the terminus was a bustle of moving luggage, friends meeting friends, parties going into Dinard to return by the seven o'clock tram. We crossed the road to his glass-fronted hotel. There was no need to ask for him. Evidently he had been watching from his window. He stood at the gate, once more in blouse and corduroys.

"Tea first, I think, and the works of art afterwards," he greeted us cheerfully. "Where's Mr Aird? Oh, what a pity! This way—straight through the kitchen—I thought it would be nicer outside——"

He led the way through the black and cavernous kitchen towards the sunny green doorway and the back garden.

Tea was set under an apple tree. The garden was some fifteen yards square, but only close under the tree was there room for the table and the four chairs. Even then we had to be careful how we moved, lest we should crush a growing plant. There were no paths—you could hardly call those single-file, six-inches-wide threads paths. Unless you put one foot fairly in line with the other pop went a radish, a strawberry, a flower. Not one single hand's-breadth anywhere was uncultivated. Behind Madge as she sat a row of scarlet runners made a bright straggle of coral, and dwarf beans filled the interstices. Over the runners tall nodding onion-heads showed, and behind them again bushes heavy with white currant. Along a knee-high latticed fence huge red-coated apples were espaliered, and the ochre flowers of a marrow sprawled over a manure-heap. Bees droned and butterflies flitted in the sun, glints of glass cloches pierced the screens of warm grey-green. And, where a tree of yellow genet covered half the wall, a large green and red parrot in a cage had suddenly become silent on hearing voices.

"That's Coco," Derry said. "Coco! Ck!—'Quand je bois mon vin clairet——'"

The parrot cocked his head on one side and regarded us with an upside-down eye.

"Chants, Coco!—'Quand je bois'—You'll hear him all right in a minute, Mrs Aird. . . . Ma mè-r-r-r-e! Nous voici à table!"

"Tout est prêt—on va servir!" came the shrill reassurance from somewhere inside the house; and an immensely fat old patronne in a blue check apron brought out tea, followed by one of the reserved young Amazons with strawberries, cream, and little crocks of jam with wasps struggling on the top.

As for Jennie and myself, I think she had completely forgotten that I had ever tried to keep her and Derry apart. I was now the person through whose good offices she sat, with at least semi-parental approval, here in his garden. I do not want to pretend to more knowledge than I have about these secretive young goddesses, but, as she sat there, her eyes still bashfully avoiding Derry's, I was prepared to take a reasonable bet that I guessed what was passing through her mind. Derry had stayed in my house in England. Her too I had asked to visit me there. What an Uncle George indeed I should be if at some time or other I were to ask them together! Only as thanks in advance, after which I could not find it in my heart to withhold the benefit, could I explain the soft and grateful looks I received from time to time. I had one of these glances quite unmistakably before I had as much as touched the cup of tea Madge poured out for me. "You see, mother's all right," it said as plainly as if she had uttered the words; "you'll make it all right with father, won't you? I know you can if you will! And thank you so much, dear Uncle George, for the perfectly lovely time we're going to have when we come to see you!" At any rate, that was my interpretation of it, while Derry, no less charming as a host than he had been as a guest, made himself honey-sweet to Madge and politely attentive to her daughter.

Nevertheless, I presently asked a direct question about the hours of departure of the trams. I saw the faintest flicker of demure fun cross his face; and I too remembered, too late, how I had once countered him about the Sunday trains from Haslemere.

"There's a four-thirty-five and a five-forty-eight," he said. "It's four-twenty now. We can cut out the pictures, of course, but it seems a pity not to have tea."

So we had nearly an hour and a half.

I don't really think that he had the least desire to show us his pictures. The pictures had served their turn handsomely enough already. He wanted to remain under the apple tree, with Madge and myself there since we must be there, but anyway with Jennie opposite to him, eating his strawberries and jam, occasionally not knowing which way to look, the possession on which his twofold heart was set, the lovely and precious godsend he had missed once but would see us all with our throats cut rather than not clasp her to his bosom in the end.

So we sat there over our empty cups, with the wasps struggling in the jam and Coco harping on the wires of his cage, but still obstinately refusing to sing "Quand je bois." Jennie got up to give him a piece of sugar, and he cocked his yellow upside-down eye at her and showed the ribbed black tongue inside his hook of a beak. Were I a painter I should paint the picture she made against the shrill yellow of the broom, with the sun full on her white summer frock, her gleaming hair, and the sun-loving bird with his head on one side watching her. "Mind his beak," Derry called; and she smiled over her shoulder, as if his mere voice were so much that she must turn her eyes whatever it said. Then she returned to the table, but not before she had plucked a sprig of genet and put it in her breast. It lay at the pit of her stately throat like a dropped blossom at the plinth of a column.

"But what about the pictures?" Madge suddenly said. "We came here to see pictures, didn't we?"

"Then that means a trail upstairs," said Derry, springing up. "Carefully through the kitchen, Mrs Aird; it's always as dark as the pit after you've been sitting out here. Perhaps I'd better go first."

He led the way through the kitchen, up the bare polished stairs, and into his room.

He cannot have had any great wish to show them; otherwise they would have been set out, or at least ready to hand. As it was he had to rummage for them in his single cupboard, selecting some, rejecting others. He showed a dozen or more of them, mostly canvas on the stretchers, but a few watercolours among them; and I fancy, if the truth must be told, that Madge was just a shade disappointed. I think she had hoped for jazz and lightning and something to go with her drawing-room cushions. Nor did I myself quite know what to make of those pictures. The first impression of them I had was a kind of—let me say datelessness; I can't think of a better word. All were landscapes, the largest of them not more than a couple of feet by eighteen inches; and at first he set them up one after another rather negligently. But as Madge began to question him his manner rather curiously changed. That preternatural skill that he had shown for two whole afternoons seemed to drop from him. He seemed to halt a little, to take risks, to advance warily into deeper water. If Mrs Aird really wished to know, then he was sincerely ready to explain. And he began to take me, for one, through the unsuspected intricacies of what at a first glance appeared to be a few casual brush-marks on the flat.

"I dare say I'm all wrong—I feel rather an ass talking about it," he said diffidently, "but I'll try to tell you. I mean I came across a fellow one day just outside Pleudihen, and he was painting what he called a Romantic Landscape. I asked him what a Romantic Landscape was, and he was just a bit stuffy about it. 'This that I'm painting,' he said. 'But why can't you paint just a landscape?' I said. 'Because I'm doing a Romantic one and I can't do two things at once,' he said. 'What are you doing it for?' I asked him. 'The Salon,' he said. 'No, but I mean *why* are you doing it?' I said. 'I suppose because I belong to the Romantic School,' says he. . . . Well, there you are, Mrs Aird. What I mean is that he was painting it because he belonged to a school that did paint that sort of thing. If he'd belonged to another school he'd have painted something dif-

ferent, I suppose. So of course that set me thinking a bit."

"I suppose so," said Madge, quite out of her depth.

"So I said to him, 'What do you want to belong to a school at all for?' 'Everybody does,' says he. 'I should have thought that was all the more reason why you shouldn't,' says I. 'Oh, if you're a blooming genius!' he said . . . a bit rotten of him, I thought, but he was years older than I. So I rather let myself go, I'm afraid. I picked up the nearest leaf. 'Look here,' I said to him, 'this thing's a leaf, just a leaf. It's a certain colour and a certain shape and certain other things; the point is it's itself and nothing else; and neither you nor I can alter it, sir' (I told you he was years older than I). 'The light hits it there, and only one possible thing can happen; it hits it there, where the direction alters, and only another thing can happen. In another minute the light will have changed, and a quite different set of things will have happened. Everything there is happens to that leaf in the course of a day, and if you know all about that leaf you know all about everything. And if you can paint it you can paint all the leaves in the world.' I hope I didn't seem too rude, but that's what I said to him."

I had moved to the window. He was talking with a mixture of diffidence and warmth, on a subject I had never heard him on before, and yet it seemed to me that I had heard something strangely like it all before.

"And what did he say?" Madge asked.

"Oh, he said something, but he was years older than I, so I just said good afternoon. I suppose he went back to school," said Derwent Rose.

Once more I was disturbed. Was this a new phase, or an old one all over again? If he was going to abolish schools and precedents and all the accepted apparatus by which the world's thought is carried on, it seemed to me to matter very little whether he dealt in words, as before, or in paint, as now. True, this parallelism might exist largely in my own imagination; he had said nothing that another man might not have said without arousing anxiety; but again he was trying to see something, though only a leaf, as if it had



never been seen before, and I noted it carefully as I looked out over the sunny northward water.

"So that's more or less what I'm after," he was saying. "I know they're pretty bad, but I think they start right. That sky's as clumsy as it can be, but it *is* horizontal. That tree's got a back you don't see as well as a front you do. So I simply don't go to look at other people's stuff. . . . Ah, this branch will explain what I mean."

It did when he pointed it out, but I should never have seen for myself. As completely as a worshipping pagan he sought to subdue himself to one given thing in one given moment. As I say, I know nothing about painting. That may be a valid theory of painting landscape or it may not. But it was his, there was no ear-say or eye-say about it, and it is of him and not of his pictures that I am speaking.

"I believe I shall pull it off one day; in fact I know I shall. . . . And now that's quite enough about me. That's my view, Mrs Aird, and this is where I live. My old landlady's a perfect dear, and Madeleine and Hortense are all right. But sometimes that brute Coco simply won't sing——"

I saw Jennie drinking in every detail of his room. There was not to be one inch of it that she could not reproduce when she went to bed that night and turned her face in the direction of St Briac. Her eyes took in his moulded ceiling-beams, the glass knob of his door, his neat bed, the herring-boned parquet of the floor. It was a little bare, perhaps, but then he spent all his days out of doors, painting those wonderful paintings, and, of course, this was not his real home. She hated that older painter—a hundred at least—who had been rude to him about the Romantic Landscapes; instantly and passionately she had taken sides with her hero. She loved the fat old Frenchwoman who looked after him and was nearly seventy; she did not so much love the two Breton women who looked after him and were not nearly seventy. Coco was a naughty bird not to sing "Quand je bois" when he was told, and if his window did not face towards Dinard, at any rate he had the tram op-

posite, and could watch it every time it started, and know that it was going almost past the gates of Ker Annic. She stood with puckered brows before his canvases. She loved trees. They would always be different to her now that he had shown her about them. She had no doubt whatever about his theory of landscape; how could it be wrong if it was his? Her fingers touched the blossom of broom at her throat that had grown on his tree.

Then she came over to the window to make sure that Dinard really did not lie that way. Most stupidly it did not. Actually it lay miles away past the glass door-knob, and the Garde Guérin to the right was invisible from Dinard. But she pressed my arm lightly. "September, Uncle George?" the pleading pressure silently said. "You'll ask us both down in September, the moment we get back from here?"

I looked at my watch.

Then I heard Madge's voice across the room, and my heart almost stopped at the swift peril.

"Then your mother was Cicely Treherne, and she married an Arnaud?"

But he weathered it. He did it with his rascally eyes. He smiled down on her.

"Well . . . I shouldn't be allowed to swear it in a court of law, because it was before I was born, you see."

The smile conquered. She laughed. I cut quickly in, my watch half out of my pocket. Gunpowder was safer than family history with Madge Aird about.

"Time?" I said.

"Ought we to be going?"

"The tram has a way of filling up."

"Then don't let's miss it," said Madge, drawing on her gloves. "Thank you for a most delightful afternoon, Mr Arnaud (all my friends are 'Mr' for at least a week, you know). I think the pictures are fascinating; they make our books look very dull. Good-bye."

"Oh, I'm coming to see you off," he said.

Something in his last words, I really can't tell you what,

made me take a swift resolve. If he was going to see us off, I was going to see him off also. I had a superstitious idea that it might be necessary. He had bamboozled Alec about his delicate chest, had only just evaded that question of Madge's that simply meant, if you like to do a little sum about it, that his mother had borne him at two different dates with a quarter of a century between them. Blandly as he might cover it up, I now expected nothing but tricks from him—tricks coolly and resolutely planned and carried out without a moment's compunction or hesitation. Very well. He was going to be watched if I had eyes in my head.

And so was Miss Jennie. With a guile so innocent and transparent that I had nothing for it but the tenderest and most smiling love, she too was quite capable of duplicity. More than once her tell-tale hand had fluttered about the flower at the pit of her throat. As I have said, I don't pretend to deep knowledge of the hearts of these superb and recently-awakened young creatures, but I do know when things are in the wind.

Nothing happened as we passed down the stairs and out into the street. I could have taken my oath of that. And, devoted as always, he walked with Madge across to the terminus, leaving Jennie to me. But I felt it coming. . . .

It came as he took the tickets at the guichet; and it was not of his doing, but of hers. I had silver in my hand, ready to repay him, and there was no reason why she also should have pressed so close to him. Again there was the little flurry about the flower at her throat; her bent nape was towards me; the thing was movingly clumsily done.

But it was done for all that. A note passed from her hand to his, and the fingers that passed it were held for a moment.

Don't tell me that that note had not been in readiness probably since the evening before. Don't tell me that it had not lain under her pillow for a whole night before being transferred to that tenderer post-bag that was sealed with the yellow flower. Don't tell me that it had not been even

more sweetly sealed. For I saw her face when she turned again. I saw its struggle of soft emotion and the will to be calm. With a quick little impulse that I did not understand she flew to her mother's arm.

"There are three seats there if we're quick," she said in a broken little voice. . . .

Only to see one another—only to speak to one another—and to pass a secret note at the first opportunity—

#### IV

"You know that we can't quarrel, Derry," I said.

"In that case——" he said quietly, but did not finish.

"We can't quarrel for the reason there's always been—that we aren't in the same ring and can't possibly get there."

"I wish——" he began, but once more suddenly stopped.

From the obscurity of the next table where the four young Frenchmen sat another soft unaccompanied song broke out.

"Listen," whispered Derry.

"En mon coeur, tendre reliquaire,  
J'avais gardé ton souvenir;  
Par lui le long de mon calvaire  
En espérant, j'ai pu souffrir!"

"Hush!" his voice came huskily from the dusk by my side.

"J'ai vécu des heures cruelles  
Loin de toi, que j'aimais toujours;  
Les revoici, pour moi plus belles  
Puisqu'elles sonnent ton retour."

The song was finished without further interruption from him.

“Ne parlons plus de nos alarmes,  
Effaçons l’horrible passé;  
Reviens, je veux sécher tes larmes  
Et revivre pour t’adorer :

“Rien n’est fini, tout recommence,  
Puisque nous voilà réunis  
Au chaud soleil de l’espérance—  
A tout jamais, soyons unis !”

It was nine o’clock of the same evening, and we were sitting outside the hotel of St Briac’s tiny triangular Square. I had broken away from dinner at Ker Annic in order that I might see him without a moment’s loss of time. What did it matter that I had had to hire a special car, and that that car was waiting for me in the darkness of a side-street now? As it had happened, I had met him on the road. Had I not done so I should have scoured the neighbourhood until I had found him.

Our backs were to the lighted windows of the hotel, but he had blotted himself into the shadow by the door. The Square might have been a set-piece on a stage. Yellow strips of light streamed from open doorways, illuminated window-squares showed the movement of dark heads within. Children playing their last ten minutes before going to bed flitted like moths in and out of the beams, and the comers and goers across the square seemed actors in spite of themselves. The four young Frenchmen sat in the shadows beyond the lighted doorway, and they had sung three or four songs before singing that one.

There was a long silence between Derwent Rose and myself. Then suddenly he got up and crossed to the group of Frenchmen. In a minute or so he came back again, and thrust himself more deeply still into the shadow.

Then I felt rather than heard his soft shaky mutter.

“Le long de mon calvaire . . . mon calvaire, mon Dieu!  
. . . effaçons l’horrible passé . . . rien n’est fini, tout recommence . . . tout recommence. . . .”

That wretched, wretched song! It had suddenly made it impossible for me to go on.

"I suppose you went over to ask the name of it?" I said sullenly; I almost said "The name of the beastly thing."

"It's called '*Il est venu le Jour.*'"

"Coincidences are stupid things."

"I dare say."

And another long silence fell between us.

Nevertheless I had not taken a special journey to St Briac merely to listen to his disturbed breathing. What I had seen that afternoon had taken matters far beyond that. If he, in his situation, thought he could do thus and thus, I was there to see, to the limit of my power, that he did not. I had already told him so, in those words. He had made a stiff reply. Then had come that calamitous song, and our present silence.

"Well . . . you can't, and there's an end of it, Derry," I said, quietly but flatly.

"So I understood you to say."

"It's what I came specially to tell you."

"I gathered that too. By the way, if you want to send your car away there's a Casino bus going in at ten o'clock. No need to waste money."

"We may not have finished our talk by then."

"Then we can finish it in the bus. I'd thought of going in myself."

"To hang about that house?"

"You and the gendarmerie can stop that easily enough."

We were back at the same point—that we, between whom a quarrel was impossible, must apparently nevertheless quarrel.

"Look here," I said at last, "can't you see my position?"

"I can. It's a rotten one."

"If I saw the faintest glimmer of hope——"

"Espérance," he muttered.

"——even from their point of view. Aird isn't a fool. He heard Jennie speak in French to you, evidently the very first time she had spoken to you—regular monkeys'-parade

business from his point of view—and he draws his own conclusions. And Mrs Aird isn't a fool either. She won't be in London two days before she's found out all about your mother."

"I see all that."

"Your mother didn't marry an Arnaud."

"Quite right. She'll know that too."

"And Aird's athlete enough to know you're no more *poitrinaire* than he is."

"I once saw him score a ripping try on the Rectory Ground. I was about twenty."

"You haven't a paper to your name."

"Not one."

"You can't even get back to England."

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that."

"And you're no better off if you do."

"That remains to be seen too."

"Then Mrs Aird's a writer herself. She knows every word Derwent Rose ever wrote."

"Oh, I had a reader here and there," he replied nonchalantly.

"And she wants to meet you—not Arnaud, but Derwent Rose. I'm to take you round there."

I felt his smile. "That would be the deuce of a hole for you to be in, George. You'd simply have to say you couldn't find me."

"But Derwent Rose is supposed to be alive somewhere. Nobody's heard of his death."

"One man extra, one man missing, so it's as-you-were. Anyway nobody'll worry much about that. I never had a tenth of your readers."

"And you're bound to be caught out here sooner or later on the question of domicile."

"Not if I see them first," he replied grimly.

"Derry, you're my despair."

"Oh, don't despair, George. Never despair. It will be all right. What about sending that car away? No good wasting good francs. You see, we've finished our talk."

"We haven't begun it yet."

"Then for goodness sake let's begin and get it over."

"Very well. Get ready. . . . I stood by you at the tramway office this afternoon. I saw what was given you there. I know what you have tucked away somewhere about you at this moment."

He had asked for it, and had got it. Hitherto I had stuck to generalities; that this was particular enough I knew by his quick movement. His foot knocked against the flimsy table, and a coffee-cup all but fell. He spoke in a low but harsh voice.

"That's not on the agenda, Coverham."

"Pardon me."

"It's not, and it's not going to be."

"If you prefer it in French, it's a *fait accompli*."

"You mean you'll bring matters to a head by telling them over there?" He jerked his head in the direction of Ker Annic.

"That rests with you, here and now."

He muttered. At first I could not distinguish the words. Then I heard, "No, not here . . . now if you like . . . it's got to come, I suppose. . . ."

He rose. "Very well," he said. "I'm ready."

"Wait a moment till I've paid for the coffee."

"Oh, I'll wait all right."

I entered the hotel and paid. When I came out again I looked right and left for him; then I saw his black smock and corduroys by a lighted door half-way across the Square. I joined him, and together we took the dark street to the right that leads to where the Calvary stretches out its arms across the harbour to Lancieux.

Past the Post Office, past the Mairie we walked without speaking—that Mairie that either as an Englishman or a Frenchman knew him not. We ascended the short lane to the promontory. It was a whispering half-tide, but all was darkness save for a low remnant in the west, a twinkle or two over the shallows, and once more Fréhel, this time directly visible and giving us distinct shadows. The last gos-



sip had disappeared from the point. I don't think even a couple of lovers lingered on the steep below. It was him and myself for it, with the Calvary above us and that twelve-miles-distant Giant as timekeeper of our encounter.

But he did an unexpected thing before he spoke. Under Fréhel's sweeping finger the Calvary started forth for a moment from the shadows. He advanced to it, dipped his knee, and crossed himself.

Then he turned to me.

"Well——" he said quietly.

I waited. It was he who began.

"Don't think I don't see the force of everything you've said. Every word of it's true, and a child could see it. For one hole you can pick in the position I can pick five hundred. But picking holes doesn't help. What you aren't allowing for is the force of circumstances."

"It's the force of circumstances I've been trying to point out," I said, as quietly as he had spoken.

"I'm speaking of the circumstances *I* find myself in, the pressure that drives *me* to do what I am doing. You don't think I'm deceiving these decent people as a matter of choice, do you?"

"You say what you've got to say. I'll tell you what I think by and by."

"I've *no* choice. I'm driven to it, can't escape it; it's my handicap. I want you to look at it for a moment from my end. What's the very first thing I've got to do? To lie about my name. I must lie, knowing perfectly well that a day, a week or a month or two at the outside will see me caught out and shown the door. Never mind other instances; let's stick to that one; the rest are just the same, only a good deal worse, some of 'em. Now here's the point. Do you suppose I should put my head into a noose like that unless I was perfectly sure that I'd finished sliding, was well dug in, and had a fairly reasonable prospect of presently going straight ahead like anybody else?"

But I had no intention of going over that ground again. My foolish excited hope that he might "pull it off" had been

scattered to the winds by the events of that afternoon. As far as he himself was concerned I wished him all the best that could happen to him, but it was not a chance that the happiness and safety of the daughter of my friends could be risked upon. Let him start to go forward first; let us have some assurance that the ghastly business was all over; then would be time enough to talk about the rest.

"We've had all that," I interrupted him.

"We haven't, George," he said earnestly. "You don't know. You can't possibly know. You've no idea of the care—the tests——"

"If it comes off all right nobody will rejoice more than I shall, Derry. What's between us at the moment is what happened this afternoon."

Instantly I was conscious of his hardening. But he did not become granite all at once.

"That can't be dragged in."

"'Dragged in!'"

"Can't you accept the situation, George?"

"No."

"Not if I solemnly assure you that I have a good chance?"

"When it's a proved certainty we'll talk about it."

"Not if I tell you my mind's perfectly made up?"

"That's the point."

"Not if it meant a breach between you and me?"

"It looks as if I had to have a breach with somebody."

"Your friends. I know. I've admitted all that. It's beastly. But I'm afraid it can't be allowed to make any difference."

"Suppose I denounce you?"

"I'm sure you'll act perfectly conscientiously whatever you do."

"That would mean your complete exposure."

"I'm prepared for that."

"You said the other night that you only wanted to see and talk to her. You said you'd go no further than that. Do you call what happened this afternoon keeping your word?"

"I meant what I said at the time. You know that I honestly hadn't a thought of deceiving you. I'm afraid that word can't be kept. Perhaps I hadn't quite realised."

"Have you realised yet?"

"Oh!"

"You haven't. Let me help you. And I'll put it as much in your favour as I can. I'll assume you're standing still for the present. I'll even assume the other possibility, or impossibility, whichever it is—that you might actually turn round again. Even then what would it mean? It would mean that I, a guest of my old friends, was lending my countenance to something against every conception of mental—decency let us say. I think I know your dates and figures pretty well by this time. You were born in '75. Now, in 1920, we'll say you're eighteen. It's taken you forty-five years to live to eighteen, and if you're to live to forty-five again it will have taken you—how long?—seventy-two years. It will then be getting on for 1950. Jennie was born in 1903. You're now forty-five to her seventeen. If this thing comes off you'll be in the early forties together. But at the same time you'll be over seventy. Look at it, Derry—look at it."

"Look at it? I have looked at it. I'll look at it again if you like. . . . Now I've looked at it again. Only you and I know it. And anyway there's nothing in it."

"Julia Oliphant knows it."

"Then only you and I and Julia Oliphant know it, and there's nothing in it."

"Then tell me if there's anything in this. What guarantee have you that exactly the same thing won't happen to you again? Take the maddest view of all—that you actually might go forward. If indications are anything you're repeating your experiences already."

"How so?" he demanded.

"In this painting of yours. I heard your explanations to Mrs Aird this afternoon. You're starting with exactly the same ideas as before—complete dissociation from everything else that's ever been done. You're going to be the

First Man again instead of the Millionth Man. How do you know it won't land you in the same mess? It used to be words; now it's paint, and that's all the difference I see."

There was a long pause; then I heard his soft, almost indulgent laugh.

"Look here, George," he said slowly. "I'll make you a fair offer. Can't you and I come to terms if I swear to you that I'll never touch another canvas or brush or pen or sheet of paper as long as I live? Will *that* satisfy you?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But doesn't that meet your objection, old fellow?"

"No. Because you'd be the same man whether you wrote or painted or not!"

"But how on earth can I alter that?"

I seized on his words. "Exactly. That's my whole meaning. You can't alter it. Whether you do the same or not, you *are* the same. For all I know you'll go on being it till the crack of doom. It's yourself that's been visited, not your books. And that's why things can't go on between you and Jennie Aird."

"Then you're going to stand between us as long as I am I?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Doesn't it strike you as a little—hard, George?" he asked slowly.

"Yes," I admitted doggedly. "But you'll be bearing it, not she."

By the swinging beam of Fréhel I saw that his head was bowed. Without my noticing it the riding-lights in the little harbour below had disappeared; as no boat could now put in till dawn the pêcheurs had waded across the shallows and extinguished them. The tall Crucifix seemed to advance and to retire again into the gloom with the next revolution of the Light.

Then he raised his head and asked about the last question I expected.

"About my money, George. You don't know exactly how much I've got?"

"No, not at this moment."

"Who bought the stuff?"

"I sold it in the best market I could find."

Ironically came his reply. "Hasn't it got a name? Are there two of us? . . . Anyway, without worrying you too much about it, I'd like an account soon. I want that matter cleared up."

"Well, never mind furniture at present. That's a detail."

"Oh no it isn't!" he answered quickly. "We seem to have different ideas as to what's detail. You've given me quite a lot of what I call detail. This is important.—You really don't remember the name of the man who bought that furniture of mine?" he mocked me.

"I've already told you you can draw to any reasonable amount."

"I see. . . . Is this it, that my furniture isn't sold at all, and you're advancing me money on the security of it?"

"Security, Derry!"

"And I still have my furniture and I owe you five hundred francs?"

"Must we talk about this now?"

There was no mistake about the granite this time.

"Yes, we'd better," he said curtly. "We've wasted time enough about things that don't matter that"—he snapped his fingers. "I've listened to what you've got to say, and now I'm going to ask you to listen to me. I owe you five hundred francs, for which I'm most sincerely obliged. But I don't think I should have asked you if I'd known. And I want you to understand that it's all I do owe you."

"Derry, old fellow——"

"Tut-tut! One tale's always good till you hear the other side. It doesn't seem to strike you that you've made pretty free with me. I'm a subject for sums and mental arithmetic exercises—you're better at that than at accounts. I'm some kind of an oddity, that's got to be shoo-ed with an apron this

way and that, and told where he's to go and not to go, and who he shall speak to and who he shan't. You'd be best pleased of all if you could shut your eyes and tell yourself that I didn't exist. But I do exist, and I'm not on sale for five hundred francs. I'm here on earth, and I don't see what you're going to do about it. I'm not less alive than anybody else; I'm more alive—a hundred times more alive. You can call me any age you please—but who'd be locked up, you or I, if you showed me to any reasonable being and told them I was forty-five? Care to try it on the Airs? I'll give you the chance if you like."

Bitterly as he spoke, he grew bitterer as he proceeded.

"This is not the first time you've interfered. You've made free with my latchkey before this. Julia Oliphant knows about me; who told her, and who gave you permission? It seems to me I've been pretty patient. I'm not saying you've not been decent about some things, that time when I was slipping about all over the scale, but I'm warning you now. I've listened to all you had to say. I've met you at every point. I've even offered—I'm hanged if I know why—not to write or paint again if that will please you. But beyond that——"

Then came an outburst the contempt of which I cannot reproduce.

"Writing! Painting! Books! Pictures! As if *they* had any more to do with life than a baby playing with its doll! They're to help fools to think they're thinking. They're to make 'em believe that but for some slight accident they could do the same themselves—as they could, and do! They call a thing like that a 'gift'; but what's the Gift that Life still has to give when they've said their very last word—they and their schools? What's been there all the time, waiting for us to get the dust out of our eyes? . . . George Coverham, try to come between me and that and as sure as God will bring to-morrow morning I'll put a stop to your arithmetic for ever! What do I care if I have to take a new name every day? What do I care if your friends the Airs bundle you out of the house? Do you think it matters to me

whose father and mother and family history and papers I steal? That's all life seems to mean to some of you. 'Where did he come from? Who knows him? Is he French or English? What does he do for his living? Has he paid his Income Tax? Is he respectable? What did he do in the war? Where does he bank? What's his club? Where does he live and how much is his rateable value?' You can't see a man for all *that!* You can't even see me now for Derwent Rose and his tombstones of books! By Jove, I said I was a ghost once! But that was when I was on the slide! I'm no ghost now! It's you others who are the ghosts! It's you who'd better get off the map! J'y suis, j'y reste; I'm here—here!"

And again Fréhel showed him there—young, beautiful, indomitable and ruthless.

Yet what did he utter but his own deeper and deeper condemnation? Simple, heart-full, innocent Jennie Aird be mated with his piercing and impossible view of the world! She herself, yes, even in her body's beauty, to be what his books had formerly been, what his painting was to be again—the very medium of his transcendental transgression! Why, one peep at that awful sleeping dynamo of his mind would be enough to drive her mad, one glimpse of the experience that had been his suffice to shrivel her opening heart for ever! Did he think to put off his flames and clouds and lightnings every time he whispered a love-word into her ear? What fate would be hers, poor Semele, did he forget, as he had forgotten before now, and put forth the enormousness of his power by her side? With every word he spoke it was less and less to be thought of. As far as my own carcass was concerned he might do what he pleased. I would not stand by and see it done. His vision and will might exceed mine a thousandfold, but even in my humble heart glimmered the small flame of what I considered to be my duty. I faced him, waiting for the Light again.

"Very well," I said as it came over his face. "Am I to take that as your last word?"

"If you please."

"Then hear mine. I have a car waiting just off the Square. You may knock me on the head, as you've already threatened. At least I shall have no further responsibility for you then. But unless you do that I'm going to get straight into that car, drive to Ker Annic, and tell the Airds the whole thing before I go to bed. You'll then have the satisfaction that it's a straight fight in the open, and that you aren't creeping like a blight into a happy house under a name that isn't even your own."

He spoke very, very slowly. "You mean that, George?"

"Enough. I'm going to stand here without moving till the next time that Light shows your face. Then I shall do what I've said."

And I stood, still as the rocks at the foot of the Crucifix, giving him his chance.

## V

The darkness seemed an omnipresent thing, positive rather than an absence, that invaded and became part of me, of him, of the place, of the hour. Not a star was to be seen, not one speck in the immensity of the night. I did not even look where I knew his black-bloused figure to be; his hand might have been uplifted for all I knew. Or for all I cared. Once more I was weary to death of him and his domination. There was not room for both of us. He might have the field henceforward to himself. I had done what I could.

It was an eleven-seconds interval. The Light came. Still I did not look at him. The Light passed away again.

Four seconds, and once more the Light.

Eleven seconds, the Light, four seconds, the Light. . . .

Then only did I look up.

I had not heard him move, but he had done so. He had sunk to the rocks at the foot of the Calvary, the rocks worn smooth with the sitting of generations of evening gossips. I heard a faint choke.



Then his voice came.

"Isn't it—isn't it a little rough on a fellow, sir?"

In a moment I was on my knees by his side. "Derry! Derry! Derry!" I repeated over and over again. It was all the speech I could find.

"Isn't it rough on a fellow, sir? Isn't it? Isn't it?"

"Derry my boy, my boy!"

"I feel you're right in a way, sir—you're bound to be wiser than I am—but when I heard them singing that song this evening . . . le long de mon calvaire . . . en espérant j'ai pu souffrir . . . rien n'est fini, tout recommence . . . it seemed so like it all, sir—you don't know—you've no idea——"

I rocked him gently in my arms.

"You don't know—you can't possibly know—nobody knows who hasn't been through it. Mon calvaire—mon Dieu! And to have it hurt you like that just because you are *able* to hope! Not the end after all, but the beginning of everything! Oh, can't you see it, sir—not even a little bit of it?"

"Yes, talk, my boy—get it over——"

"I shall be all right in a minute. It simply got me by the throat. That song, I mean. I suppose it's just an ordinary song really—the French are like that—but it got me by the throat, it was so like me. So like the way things have been with me. What did they say it was called? I've forgotten."

"*'Il est venu le Jour.'*"

"Yes, that's it. The day's come. After all that. It came that night—I'm not making a joke, sir—that night in the garden. It's been day ever since. Night's been day, like a soft sun shining all night. And I wouldn't ask you to lift a finger to help me if I didn't know it was quite all right. I do know. It's she who's made everything all right. That's the funny thing about her—that she's made everything perfectly all right again. I wonder why that is?"

"Don't wonder. Just stay quiet a while."

"But a fellow can't help wondering a bit. Why should

it have made everything all right the moment I set eyes on her? But she did. I told you about something happening before, sir, something I can't quite remember about. That seemed like some sort of an emptying—leaving me all empty and aching, if you understand. But this filled it all up again, with happiness and I don't know what—lovely things—all since that night. That's what makes me so sure. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. It isn't the kind of thing one cares to be untruthful about, is it? You're in the same house with her—you see her—you know what I mean—”

Between this simplicity and his late menace, what could I say for his comfort, what do for my own? I was torn in two. I was a weary, elderly man, careworn and disillusioned; but he, through unimaginable tribulation, had mysteriously found this place of stillness and peace and hope. What his intimidation had not done, that his utter reliance and trust now began to do. He sat up on the rocks and began to talk.

“You know something about my life, sir. Miss Oliphant knows most, of course, but you know quite a lot. If it doesn't sound most awfully conceited, I was rather a nice sort of fellow at eighteen. All the same I always felt there was something not quite right. I don't mean anything I did; I mean there always seemed to be a sheet of thick glass between me and the things I wanted to get close to. I could see through it all right, all the brightness and the colours, but somehow I couldn't get any nearer. There wasn't any feel of warmth somehow. It may sound silly to you, but I used to press up against that glass like a kid at a shop window full of things he wanted. It wasn't that I wasn't fond of things and people and so on. I was frightfully fond of them. But I couldn't manage to let them know it. Even my mother. When she wasn't there I was tremendously fond of her, but when she came—I don't know—of course I was fond then—I suppose it was my imagination. But when she wasn't there she meant an enormous lot to me, and when she came she was just a nice little mother I was very fond of but never managed to let her know—just as if I was

ashamed. And it was so with everything else. I used to get excited over Shakespeare and Juliet and Hamlet and Falstaff and all those people, but they made other people seem rather shadowy. Then, when I was about twenty-one, it worried me fearfully sometimes. Other people didn't seem to be like that. I wanted to be like other people. They hadn't blocks of glass in front of them all the time. Somehow they seemed so nice and happy and warm all the time. I had a dog I was really fonder of than I was of anybody. And I wanted to be fond. I'm afraid this sounds absolute rot, sir, but I can't explain it any better."

"I'm very much interested. Go on."

"Well, that's lasted more or less all through my life. I'd get all in a glow about things—just things, and of course people too in a way: somebody's hair under a stained-glass window in a church, or the organ or the Psalms. But always something in between, I don't know what. It worried me because I knew I was all glow inside if I could only get it out. I was awfully fond of Miss Oliphant, for instance, but I simply couldn't let her know it. I used to go and see her sometimes and sit there wondering about it. 'Now here's a jolly sort of girl,' I used to think, 'as good as they make 'em—good-looking, sometimes nearly beautiful—and awfully fond of you. Now why can't you get on with her? Why is there always something you don't say, don't really want to say perhaps, but it would make such a difference if you could say it?' I used to ask myself that, but there was never any answer. There never has been. There it always was, that sheet of glass, as polished as you please, but shutting me right out from everything everybody else seemed to have."

"But your books, Derry? You weren't shut out from everybody there!"

"Perhaps that was where it went. You can give things to other people in a book you can't when you're sitting next to them. That's why I don't care if I never do anything of that sort again. I want to get near. . . . And now"—his voice fell to a happy hush—"it's all right. That was what

she did, all in a moment, all in one look. That glass went. That's why I know that as long as she's near to me no harm will happen to me. Oh, I know it."

Then, without the slightest warning, he broke into a heart-rending appeal. It was as if he had suddenly remembered that I was not yet won over.

"Tout recommence! Mon calvaire, mon calvaire! . . . Have I to lose it the moment I see it? Must I go back the same way? Can't I go the other? Haven't I carried my poor little bit of a cross too, sir? Haven't I? Haven't I? J'ai vécu des heures cruelles. . . . And hasn't it sometimes been so heavy that I've prayed it would crush me and get it over? And even when I've done the rottenest things haven't I always wanted to do something better—always? Thank God for the glass those times anyway! Sometimes I've stood off and looked at myself and said: 'Poor devil, it isn't you really—if you must do this get it over as quick as you can and start afresh!' I've always started afresh. I never give up hope. . . . And do I get nothing at all at the end of it, sir? Are you going to scrape up all those bits of glass she broke, and put them together again, and send me back the same way? Not even a chance, now that everything really *is* beginning again? Now that the day's come? Now that for a week every night's been like a soft warm sun shining? Are you going to turn me back?"

Oh, had he but knocked me on the head a quarter of an hour ago it would have been easier! Then had I been at rest, with those who had built desolate palaces for themselves before me. Or could I but have believed what he so firmly believed! Yet must I not almost believe it? Had he not now almost compelled me? What I had feared to find that morning at St Briac, the morning after the first meeting of their eyes over the car, had not happened, but something no less profound had. That hard clear obstruction that had stood immutably between him and life all his days had been taken away. I remembered my speculation as to whether there were not two loves, Jennie's and Julia's, a sacred and a profane. Two? How if he were right, and there were not

two loves, but one love only, which is simply—Love? What then became of all my arithmetic, my rectitude, my conventions, even my duty to my friends? What, by comparison with that love, that law-annihilating love that breaks the invisible adamant fetters that bind the old Adam and bids the new man stand forth, were any or all of these things? They were no more than those social rates and taxes, registrations, commitments, undertakings, contracts, all the rest of the paper business of our lease of life on which he had lately poured his scorn. The infinitude of passion and suffering of a single human soul seemed to me to dwarf them all. And if a man must sin, let him sin at the fringe and circumference of things, not at their centre.

Could he give me any assurance whatever of these things he ached no more to enter his heaven than I ached to thrust him in.

Every four seconds, every eleven seconds, Fréhel opened the furnace of his white and blazing eye. Tremulously in and out of the gloom the Calvary seemed to advance and to recede again. Dimly I distinguished Derry's face—young, faithful, agonised, interceding for his lovelier self. . . .

It is a fearful responsibility a man past his prime assumes when he bids such a creature to hope no more, but to veil his face and to return to the pit whence he was digged. . . .

And how had he offended me? He had merely received a note—had not even given it, but had simply accepted it and held for a moment the fingers that had passed it. . . .

Had I, in my own insignificant youth, never done such a thing?

"Derry," I said gently, "I can't go over old ground again. At present—I say at present—I'm staying in the house. I must now decide how much longer I can stay there. But first tell me exactly what it is you propose to do."

"I haven't any intentions at all, sir."

"At present you haven't. You hadn't before, but that didn't last. What is it you want?"

"Only that you shouldn't thrust me back into—that other."

"And then?"

"I can't think beyond that, sir."

"But there will be something beyond that."

He was silent while the Light revolved twice, thrice, then:

"Et revivre pour t'adorer . . . like a soft warm sun even in the night," he breathed scarcely audibly. "You can't call it sleeping. Something blessed that you can't see is going on behind it all the time. Something seems to be breathing. That's what happens in the night now. It isn't sleeping; you're too happy to want to go to sleep. Then she smiles. Not like in the toyshop. She didn't smile in the toyshop; that was a different kind of look altogether. She smiled yesterday when we were having tea, but you weren't looking. And twice to-day—twice. . . . At first I was afraid my painting was going to excite me a bit, upset me. Once or twice it did a little. I didn't want to talk about it much this afternoon for fear of it upsetting me. But everything calms down when she looks and smiles. It's just her being there. There isn't any glass at all; the glass is between us two and everybody else in the world. Painting's perfectly safe with her by me—perfectly safe. . . . But nothing's safe without. I shall slip again without her now. I felt myself even begin to slip that time you said she was going away. It was frightening. . . . Don't ask me to try the experiment, sir; it's so horribly risky; but if they were to spring it on me that she *was* going away I know quite well what would happen. It would be like before; I should have to pack up my traps and disappear again. And that time it would be the end. . . . But as long as I'm with her it's all clear ahead—the new way—the way I always tried to find and always missed—il est venu le jour——"

He was hardly speaking to me. Little as I could see of his face, I could divine what passed there. After that recent violence, this almost dumb meekness and awaiting my judgment. And because he was not speaking to me, but was communing with his own solitary soul as gravely as he had bent his knee before That which rose above us into the night, I knew that I must end by believing him. At a word

I could have sent her away. He had offered to put himself to the test of her departure. That he might be believed he had even offered to risk once more that hideous hiatus in his life.

But it was not demonstration that swayed me to my irrevocable act. It was rather that transcending love that he himself had invoked. Love and pity lest this my son should once more be cast to the wolves of pain welled up like a sudden fountain in my heart. Nay, not from my own poor heart did it well, but from That above us that showed its dim crowned head and outspread arms every four seconds, every eleven seconds, four times a minute, cloaked itself in the night again, and again softly reappeared with the sweep of the occulted Light—from That I think my pity descended. No thought for the morrow had that Original taken, no care of father or mother or friend, but only for the weak and the outcasts of the world. Who was outcast if this grave and destiny-ridden young figure before me was not? I had stood before him waiting for him to strike me down; now in his patience and submission he struck me down.

I could leave the Airs. I could turn my back on them for ever. This dark-bloused lad was my loved son, who mutely implored me to be given his chance. Were the Airs to die I should have to part from them. Death, that comes unannounced at any moment, parts us from all our friends. My portrait need never hang in the Lyonesse Club to remind Madge Aird that she had once had a friend who had betrayed her. I need not even return to England. So Derry might but establish himself, what did it matter though I wandered? I had no love, nobody had a love for me, such as that that made his days and nights softly radiant. In a few years I should be gone. But he would be once more in the glory of his prime, living a life of my giving. In him would be my resurrection. To help him over this dead point the rest of my life was at his service.

His prayer should be answered.

But not without a stipulation. When all is said one has

to be practical. Should she after all fail to lead him by the hand forward again into those fair and untrodden fields of life, all was rescinded. He must report progress. No step must be taken without my knowledge. One does not meditate a treason against one's friends quite so light-heartedly as all that. Nor need he yet be told what I had in my mind. I turned to him.

"I shall go back now," I said.

He did not speak.

"But I shall do nothing to-night. In fact I won't do anything till I've seen you again."

He did not thank me in words.

"But the understanding is that you do nothing either. Is that agreed?"

"I promise that, sir."

"Then that's all. I'm very tired. I think I want to sleep."

"Won't you lean on my shoulder, sir?"

"Perhaps I will——"

Only to touch her willing hand—only to carry her letter in his breast—only to feel that in the unison of their two hearts the rest of the world might be lost in oblivion——

## VI

My reason for not telling him of my decision was that I did not wish him to have the uneasiness of knowing that he was responsible for it. Nor am I apologising for the mood in which I had made my choice. I had done so, however, without very much regard for necessary and practical details. These it was that I began to turn over in my mind as, racked and restless, I lay in my bed that night.

And first of all I began to realise that my choice involved me straight away in that very web of sophistry and dissimulation that I had wished to avoid. I had imagined on the spur of the moment that by walking out of the Airs' house with the most plausible explanation I could find, or for that



matter none at all, I should be observing some sort of a decency to the roof that had so hospitably sheltered me. But when I came to look at it again! . . . Good God, what sort of decency was that? To begin with, when you walk away from somewhere you walk to somewhere, and where was I to walk to? Away from Dinard altogether? That would be to walk away from Derry. Take him away with me? That would be to take him away from Jennie and all hope. Move to an hotel? I should be running into my late friends every hour, at every turn.

In a word, what I was contemplating was not war on the Airds, nor even a hypocritical neutrality. It was a vile assassination. And suddenly I saw, and with a most singular clearness, that my only way out, the only possible and honourable course, was not to leave the Airds and Dinard at all, but to leave the earth altogether. Believe me, who know, that that in the end is what contact with such a man as Derwent Rose amounts to.

But I cannot say that suicide, sentimental, religious or of whatever kind, has ever strongly attracted me. There was a much, much simpler way out. Derry knew nothing of what had passed through my mind while Fréhel's sweeping beam had conjured up that pallid Christ out of the darkness. I had not told him that I was prepared to sacrifice myself for him. All that he had been promised was a respite on terms till to-morrow.

A flood of mean gratitude swept over me that I had told him no more. I have never known a viler or more shameful ease than that that possessed me when it became plain that I could go back on him and he be none the wiser. I am not sure that my recreant lips had not the impudence to thank God that only I knew the depth of my cowardice and indecision.

For my plan was utterly impossible of execution. It was as impossible to give him his chance as I had found it to refuse it. Racked and restless I tossed. I even imagine I had a slight touch of delirium, for fantastic thoughts and images seemed to dance and interweave and pop up and

disappear again before me. I saw Derry back in Cambridge Circus again, and his black oak furniture played the most unamusing tricks. Sometimes his table would be a litter of newspapers and clothing and brown paper, with an overturned teacup and the two halves of a torn novel lying on the top; then it would magically clear itself, and Jennie would be standing by it, a sort of mental extension of Jennie, whose face, however, I did not see. His catalogued shelves of books would disappear, and there would be an easel in the middle of the room, and canvases round the walls, and these would change to the rugs and lacquer of Julia Oliphant's little recess. . . . Then the whole of Cambridge would slide obliquely away, and I would see Jennie's back as she mounted the ladder of a South Kensington Mews. Then he would appear from nowhere and take her in his arms, and he had a golden beard, and the next moment was riding in a hansom with nothing of Jennie visible but her slipper. . . . Julia Oliphant's slipper in the Piccadilly, Peggy and her garters, lots of slippers, Jennie's dancing slippers, Jennie in the Dinard Bazaar, Jennie at the guichet slipping a note into his hand. The ticking of my watch on the table annoyed me, but I did not get up, and presently I had ceased to hear it. Then it came again, regularly, irregularly, once every four seconds, once every eleven seconds, tick-tick, darkness and the Light, tick-tick, darkness and the Light. . . .

So I tossed, waking every now and then with a start to tell myself that something must be done—where nothing was possible to be done.

And so, like Peter, I was prepared to deny him ere the cock crew.

I had, in fact, a touch of fever. The next morning I managed to dress for déjeuner, but when I entered the salon I must needs choose that moment to give a little lurch and stagger. Alec caught me.

"Here, what's all this about?" he said.

"It's all right."

He gave me a quick look. "It isn't all right. You'd better come upstairs to bed again."

So I was undressed, and back into bed I was put, my protests notwithstanding.

The affection with which I was treated certainly helped me very little in my resolution to glide like a snake noiselessly out of this house, leaving my poison behind me. Madge was in and out the whole of the afternoon, a perfect angel of attention and comfort; Alec hunted out an English doctor—I am sure he believed that a French one would subtly and diabolically have made away with me. I was told that I must stay in bed for some days. I demurred, but I really doubt whether I could have got up.

So they turned Ker Annic upside down for me. To leave father and mother and friends is a thing you have to do quickly and with immediate acceptance of the consequences, or not to do at all. You mustn't begin to let people be kind to you.

And no less than in material things were they solicitous to keep from me anything that might worry me. Madge laughed away my apologies for the havoc I made of her engagements, Alec vowed that it was a top-hole way of spending a holiday to sit at my open window, pretending he was smoking outside, while the gentle summer breeze that stirred the curtains blew it all in again. I think his crowning kindness was to get in a barber daily to shave me. Were I to grow a beard I fear it would not be a golden one.

And even Jennie visited me once or twice, which is very much indeed from seventeen who has never known a headache to one who has known more than he cares to think about.

On Jennie's first two visits to me other people were in and out of the room; but on the third occasion I was alone. It was mid-afternoon, and Madge and Alec, I knew, had gone out to pay a call. They had left me everything that I was likely to need until their return, and I had imagined the house to be empty. But Jennie tapped and entered, and

asked me how I was. Then she crossed over and stood by the window, where the sun touched the gold of her hair and showed the shadow of her arms within her light sleeves.

"Nothing very amusing to do this afternoon, Jennie?" I asked from my pillow.

"No, only pottering about," she replied.

"Then won't you come and have tea with me presently?"

"I'll order it now if you like."

"Do, and then come back and sit with me unless it bores you."

She went out, and presently returned. She was not particularly good about a sick-room. She gave a superfluous touch to things here and there, and then bent over me and shook my pillow with a gesture that somehow reminded me of that quick little run to her mother's side at the tramway terminus at St Briac.

"Would you like me to read to you?" she asked.

"Thank you—presently perhaps."

"Did they change those flowers this morning?"

I smiled. "There won't be any flowers left in the garden soon, I get so many."

"Then there isn't anything I can do," she said helplessly.

Poor child, I don't think that I myself was entirely the object of her concern—no, not even though I was so blest as to be a link between her and a certain young Englishman who went about in French clothes and was known by a French name. I don't think she quite knew what she wanted, except that it was exquisite to be a little mournful, and to be doing something for somebody. In spite of that impulsive little gesture, I don't think her mother had her confidence. That was rather the compounding of a secrecy than a confidence. It was an atonement, a guilty little reparation that but locked up her secret the more securely. I am aware that young girls are traditionally supposed to fly instantly to their mothers with their troubles of this sort. I can only say that that is not my experience. Far more frequently they will fly to a confidante of their own age, and even once in a while to a person like myself. Her

mother would be much, oh, ever so much to her; but she would not be told about that note that had been surreptitiously slipped from hand to hand.

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself for the last three days, Jennie?" I asked.

A Brittany crock of genêts made fragrant the room. Her eyes were fixed on the flowers.

"Yesterday I went for a bicycle ride," she said.

"Oh? I didn't know you had a bicycle here."

"I hadn't. I hired one."

"Where did you go? Anywhere nice?"

Instead of answering my question she said, with her eyes still on the flowers, "I've got something for you, Uncle George."

"And what's that?"

"Here it is."

From some tuck in the region of her waist she drew out a note, which she handed to me. With my elbow on my pillow I read it. It was on a page torn out from a sketch-book, and it ran:

"I hear you're laid up and hope you'll soon be all right again. I didn't thank you properly the other night; I couldn't; you know what I mean. Don't worry about my not keeping my promise; that's all right; everything's as-you-were till you're about again. But then I want to see you as soon as ever you can. You get well and don't worry.

"D. R."

Slowly I folded up the note and put it into the pocket of my pyjama-jacket. She seemed fully to expect my silence. The shadow of a marten fled swiftly across the sill of the window. The house-martens built at Ker Annic.

At last, "I see," I said slowly. "I see."

She did not seem to think it necessary to reply. Neither was it.

"I see," I said again. Then, "Yesterday you went

cycling," I said. "What did you do the day before?"

"I went for a walk."

"And the day before that?"

"I went for a walk too."

"Jennie . . . were they supposed to know about these walks—you know who I mean?"

"Father and mother? No."

"Where did they think you were?"

"Don't know. I didn't say anything at all."

"They've no idea you went for two walks and a bicycle ride with Monsieur Arnaud?"

No reply.

That is to say, no reply in words; but for anything else her reply was plain enough. In every line of her lovely resolute short-featured little face I read that they did not know, were not to know, and that in the last resort she didn't care a straw whether they knew or not. And I remembered that in the matter of the note it was she who had taken the initiative, not he. A beautiful young woman is the devil from the moment when she gets too old to slap.

But the thing was grave. He had given me an undertaking which, his note now assured me, he was faithfully keeping; but I had no undertaking from her. And bachelor as I am, I am under no delusions as to what happens when mine, the proud, stalking, choosing sex, is marked down by its demure, still and emotional opposite number. Something can be done with us; we give undertakings and abide by them; but what can be done when the Jennie Airs take the bit between those pearls of their teeth? I shook my head. I shake it over the same problem still.

"But look here, Jennie," I said quietly. "This is all very well, but is it quite—playing the game?"

This also she evidently expected. "About father and mother? I've left school. I'm old enough to think for myself. Mother says so. Anyway I'm going to. She always said I should."

"But mother doesn't know about these walks and bicycle rides."

Obstinately she contested every little point, even a casual plural.

"There's only been one bicycle ride."

"One then. She doesn't know about it."

"I can't help that."

"But of course you could——"

"No I couldn't," she rapped out. "I mean I just *can't* help it. How can anybody help it? How can anybody do anything about it? It's a thing that happens to you, and it happened to them before, and I expect they did just as they liked about it, and didn't care a bit what anybody said! I can just see mother if anybody'd said she wasn't going for a walk with father!"

"You can't see anything of the sort, Jennie. If I remember rightly what your mother said, she had to sit still in her own carriage till her own footman opened the door. That was what happened when your mother was your age."

"Well, they don't do that nowadays, and mother knows it," she retorted.

The heartless logic of youth! It will turn your own words against you as soon as look at you. Because her mother had recognised that the world did not stand still she was to be made an accessory to this deception.

"Then," I said presently, "if they don't know, ought I to know?"

"You knew before," she said. "They didn't."

"But they're bound to find out."

"Oh, I expect everything will be settled by then!" she calmly announced.

The dickens it would! I lay back on my pillow. Fortunately the appearance of tea at that moment gave me a little time in which to collect my thoughts. Jennie removed various objects from the bedside table, took the tray from the maid, and began to pour out.

"Then," I said by and by, "why aren't you bicycling—or walking—this afternoon?" I wanted to have the position quite clear. If she could spend three days with him in succession, why not a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth?

"I had to give that note to you," she said.

"Ah, the note! I forgot that. . . . Have you any idea what's in it?"

She blushed crimson, flamed with reproach. All the same, I contrasted her shameless deception of her parents with this point of honour about peeping into an unsealed note to myself. These heaven-born young beauties draw the line in such odd places.

"I never thought——", she said, biting her lip; and I hastened to set her right.

"Good heavens, Jennie, you can't think that I meant *that!* I meant in a general way, what the subject of it is."

"I know what he thinks," she said, the fierce colour slowly retiring again.

"Well, what does he think?"

"He thinks you were perfectly ripping to him the other night, about not doing anything till you saw him again, and when I told him you were ill he was awfully upset, and tore a page out of his sketch-book and wrote the note that very moment."

The devil! . . . But I went on.

"So he was sketching, and you went with him?"

"Yes. He did a sweet sketch, with me in it," she breathed, her eyes softly shining.

Only to see her and to go for bicycle-rides with her—only to speak to her and to paint her among the glowing sarrasin, the green translucence of the woods, the golden seaweed of the rocks or wherever it was——

"Oh, he did! And where was this?"

It was neither among the sarrasin, nor in the green woods, nor on the shore.

"It was miles and miles away, right past Saint Samson, nearly at Dinan, at a château called La Garaye," she said softly. "I never saw anything so lovely. There's a huge wide avenue of beeches like a tunnel—it's all in the middle of a lovely beechwood—and there's a lovely soft grass-ride right down the middle. Then at the bottom there are two great masses of ivy that used to be the château gates. And



past them are the little white bits of the ruins. And there was an enormous loud humming everywhere, like a hundred aeroplanes. That was them thrashing at the farm with four horses that went round and round. We rode our bicycles down the green ride and put them up by some farm-buildings. They don't a bit mind your going anywhere you like, and they said he could paint if he wanted to. So he got out his things and I watched him. He didn't want me for the picture at once, because he had all the other to do first. Then he made me lie down in a frightfully nettley place, but he only laughed and said I'd got to be just there because it was where he wanted me. My hands are all nettled yet, look. So he painted me, Uncle George, and that horse-thing never stopped humming, and oh, it was so hot and blue and drowsy—I nearly went to sleep once. But the loveliest thing of all was afterwards. We climbed about among all those stones and ivy, and then there was a tower. Just like a castle tower, Uncle George, but not a hole or a window anywhere, except a place at the bottom just big enough to creep through. And what it was was an old pigeon-place, where they used to keep pigeons. All honeycombed inside with holes for thousands and thousands of pigeons. But, of course, there weren't any pigeons there, only an old sitting hen among the nettles that scurried round and round and then clucked away. It was like being at the bottom of a kiln or something, with grasses and flowers and things round the top and the sky *e-ver* so blue! And all those thousands of pigeon-holes, all grown up with birch and ivy and nettles and that silly old hen! I picked a bit of herb-robert. Oh, it was a heavenly place!"

Heavenly indeed, I thought grimly. Heaven enough inside that columbarium, with only a small hole to creep in at, and the muffled drone of that horse-gin, shut out by the walls that had once been filled with the cushioning of a thousand doves and only God's blue looking down on them from the top!

Heavenly enough to make your heart ache when you remembered that there, in that ruined place of dead doves, he

conscientiously sought to keep his promise to me—while she had given never a word to take back. Oh, I saw it all right. No question about that. She took very good care that I should see it. . . .

For I was being as softly cajoled and canvassed and propagandised as ever I was in my life. Derry, piloting me from shop to shop into the Dinard Bazaar, had taken me by the arm; but she wound herself in among my very heart-strings. And her plan was to upheap me with unasked confidences before I could say her nay. After that, if I guessed her thoughts rightly, there would be nothing for me to do but to respect the sacred but unwanted encumbrance. I should then be enlisted against Alec and Madge. Those of us whom the years have perhaps mellowed a little are ever at the mercy of calculated guile of this sort. To tell somebody something they don't want to know—and then to put them upon their honour not to divulge it!

The boy, the father of the man, indeed! Save us from the machinations of the maiden who is mother of the woman!

For she was a woman. In little more than a week or two she had almost visibly altered, shot up into maturity. I had no doubt that he would keep his word to me; but—*only* to see her, *only* to speak to her! Only! Though it were but looking, what inch of beauty was there about her of which I could dare to say, "His eyes have not embraced that, his glance has not been as his very lips upon it?" Though it were but hearing, what tone was there in the sweet gamut of her voice of which I could tell myself, "His ears at any rate have not heard that?" Not one. And under the homage of his gazing, under the flattery of his hearing, the last particle of her girlhood had turned and altered. That hair, so recently a ruddy plait to be "put up" on occasion, was now a bride's single garland, its golden strands to be unwound again on an occasion that was not even her parents' concern. Disdain was now all that young Charterhouse, young Rugby had from those pebble-grey

eyes. And that tongue of hers, lately so petulant with the world, was now her subtlest weapon, to get under my guard, to seduce me with her confidences about pigeon-towers and what not, and by and by (I had not the slightest doubt) to say with a touching and heartfelt sigh, "Oh, what a comfort it is to have one person one can tell everything to!"

But this was all very well. Quite excellent to pat my pillow, and ask me whether my flowers had been changed, and to fuss about pouring out tea for me. But, while I had more or less got their measure singly, I had no idea what double-dealing they might not be capable of together. So as she still sat with shining eyes, dreaming again of that columbarium, I pressed to the next point.

"So he painted you. All in one sitting?"

She dropped the eyes. "I think he said it might take three or four."

"In fact it might be cheaper in the long run to buy the bicycle instead of hiring it?"

She was demure. "Oh, I don't think so, Uncle George."

"What do they charge for the hire of a bicycle?"

"I don't know, Uncle George. I haven't paid anything yet."

"Then you still have it? Haven't they asked any questions about it?"

She looked quickly and innocently up. "Father? . . . Oh, it isn't here! You see the tram's almost as quick to St Briac."

"Oh! Then it's at St Briac?"

"Yes. In the kitchen."

"The kitchen where Coco lives?"

"Yes. That one. But, of course, Coco's outside except when it's raining. And he has sung 'Quand je bois mon vin claret.' He sang it beautifully."

"I'm sure he did," I assented grimly. . . . "Now tell me a little more of what Monsieur Arnaud said when he was so grateful to me for not doing my plain duty."

Her eyes were full on mine, with an expression I did not

understand. Somehow the pretty scatter of freckles across the bridge of her nose seemed to give the look an added directness. Her lips parted, but not in a smile.

"You needn't call him Monsieur Arnaud," she said.

"What then?" I asked quickly. "What do you call him, if I may ask?"

At her reply the teacup almost dropped from my hand.

"That's really what he said I had to tell you this afternoon," she said. "Of course I call him Derry, like you."

## VII

I was hardly ill enough to have a temperature-chart over the head of my bed; had there been one heaven knows how high into the hundreds it must have leaped. I had been prepared for progression, development. Swiftly as things seemed to have advanced, from taking a single bicycle ride with him to keeping a bicycle in his kitchen was after all only a matter of degree. But this, of so totally different a piece, positively stunned me.

"Derry!" I echoed stupidly. "Derry what?"

"Rose, of course." Then, rushing almost breathlessly to forestall me, "But of course I know it's the most *fr-r-rightful* secret! I know that only the three of us know. And it's splendid of you, darling Uncle George, to have stuck up for him the way you did! I wouldn't breathe a single word, not if they were to stick knives into me!"

Her eyes brimmed with thanks for my loyalty, disloyalty or whatever it was. But what, in God's name, had he been mad enough to tell her? Everything? Had he told her the whole story rather than strangle her on the spot?

"Tell me what he said," I moaned in a weak voice. Better know the worst and get it over.

"Of course I'm going to. But oh, how could I be so horrid to you about that note! As if you *would* think that I should peep into a note anyway! You do forgive me, don't you?"

"If you're going to tell me tell me quickly," I groaned.

So this, if you please, is what came next:

"It was while we were in that pigeon-place, where the hen was. They look like rows and rows of little square holes, where the pigeons used to live I mean, but when you put your hand in they're quite big inside, all scooped out, lots of room for both pigeons and all their eggs. And one row hooks round inside one way and the other the other. I discovered that when I put my hand in, and I turned round to tell Derry. And do you know, Uncle George, he's got such a funny name for that place. He calls it the Tower of Oblivion. I didn't know what oblivion was, so I didn't know what he meant just at first, but I think it's a splendid name for it now. You see——"

"You were saying that you turned round to tell him something."

"I was just coming to that. So I turned round, and at first I had rather a fright, because I couldn't see him. I thought he'd gone, but I didn't see how he could, because there was only that one little way in and I was standing close to it. Then I saw him behind the bushes and things, all among the nettles, and his head was against the wall. I made a noise, but he didn't seem to hear me. So then I touched him.

"What's the matter, M'sieur Arnaud?" I said. "Is something the matter?"

"Well, he didn't move, Uncle George. For ever so long he didn't move. Then he turned round, and oh, his poor eyes! I don't mean he was crying. He didn't cry once all the time. But he made me so anxious I didn't know what to do.

"What is the matter, M'sieur Arnaud? Do tell me what's the matter!" I said.

"You mustn't call me that," he said. "It isn't my name."

"Not your name!" I said. "But Sir George Coverham calls you that, and mother calls you that, and Sir George wouldn't have told mother so if it wasn't so, and they call you that where you live!"

“‘They do, and it isn’t my name,’ he said. ‘I want to tell you my name,’ he said.

“‘Well, I thought it awfully funny everybody calling him something that wasn’t his name. So I said, ‘Well, what is your name?’

“‘Rose,’ he said.

“‘What besides Rose?’ I said.

“‘Derwent,’ he said. ‘Derwent Rose. But George calls me Derry.’

“‘George? Do you mean Sir George Coverham?’ I said.

“‘Yes. I sometimes call him George,’ he said.

“And then, Uncle George, he put his head against the wall again and went on saying to himself, ‘The Tower of Oblivion, the Tower of Oblivion,’ over and over again.”

I closed my eyes, but it was like closing them in a swing, so sick and dizzy did I feel. I had never seen that Tower in my life, yet somehow I seemed to be there—walled in, cut off from the rest of mankind, with only that hot deep blue overhead, and the grasses that fringed the circular top minutely bright and intense against it. The loud droning of the threshing-gin at the adjacent farm seemed to be in my ears, but in my heart was a more moving murmur. Gentle and forgotten place! With what croonings, what flutterings, had it not once been astir! Those little cavities into which she had thrust her hand were the cells of a once-throbbing heart. But who had built a Tower of stone to guard the dove’s faithfulness? What masonry could make that, the very emblem of love, more secure? Of all birds, the constant dove to be thus immured? Towers are for the defence of the helpless, not of that invulnerable meekness and strength. All the stones in the world could not more fortify those soft immutable hearts. Such humility, yet so stable: such defencelessness, yet so steadfast! It was in this wondrous place, thrice strong without but ten times strong within, that Derwent Rose had sought his atonement. He too, hard without, was all tenderness within. He had no choice but to lie to the rest of the world, but she must be told the truth. Arnaud would do well enough for others,

but he had no peace unless to her he was Derwent Rose. It was his comfort to tell her so, and that Tower was in truth his confessional, the Oblivion of his dead years.

"But of course you know all about it, Uncle George," she went on. "I didn't, you see, and that's what made it sound so queer. So I said to him, 'But why do you call yourself Arnaud if your name is Rose?'"

"'Because something once happened to me,' he said.

"'What?' I asked him.

"'I don't know,' he said. 'George doesn't know. Nobody knows. A doctor once tried to tell me, but he didn't know either.'

"'But what sort of a thing?' I said. 'What does it do?'"

"'It makes me younger,' he said. 'I'm years and years older than I look. I'm not young at all.'

"'But I don't understand,' I said. 'If it makes you young then you *are* young, aren't you?'"

"And then he smiled. I was so glad to see him smile. He'd been fearfully mopey up to then.

"'That's so,' he said. 'And anyway it's all over now. If it wasn't I shouldn't be telling you. If it wasn't over I shouldn't be here, Jennie.'

"He called me Jennie for the first time. He hadn't called me anything up to then, ever.

"'Then if it's all over what are you bothering about it for?' I said. 'Was it your fault?'"

"'No,' he said.

"'Then,' I said, 'if a thing isn't a person's fault I think we ought to be sorry for them, and it doesn't matter if it's all over. And,' I said, 'if Uncle George calls you Derry I'm going to call you Derry too. It really is all over, Derry dear?'"

"'Look, Jennie,' he said.

"And then, Uncle George, he looked up at the sky out of the top of the Tower, and bent his knee and crossed himself three times, like this."

Over her young breast her hand did what his had done.

"'And you promise it wasn't your fault?' I said.

"That was my promise, Jennie," he said.

"Then," I said, "I don't want to hear another word about it. I won't listen. You're not to tell me any more."

"So I wouldn't listen, and when he opened his mouth I just did this——"

And laughingly, with her hands tight over her ears, she shook her head. She would no more peep behind his word than she would have peeped into his note.

"And all this was yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Where is he to-day?"

"I only saw him just for a minute this morning. He wouldn't let me go with him to-day. He said I must come to you and tell you what I've just told you. So I waited till father and mother had gone out and then I came."

"And when father and mother come back? How do I stand? What am I to do?"

She sat straight up. "To do, Uncle George? But you *promised* him!"

"I promised him for the moment."

"Well, this *is* the moment, isn't it? You'll see him as soon as ever you get up again, won't you?"

"Between the two of you I don't seem to have very much choice," I muttered. . . .

Suddenly through the open window came the sound of voices below. Alec and Madge had returned. Jennie flew to my glass, and then, apparently finding all well there, turned, smiled, and put her finger on her lips. She was busily packing up my tray when Madge entered.

"Well, decided to live, George?" the kind creature rallied me. "All sorts of sympathetic messages for you from the Nobles and the Fergusons and the Tank Beverleys—run-after creature that you are! Been to sleep?"

"No."

Jennie passed behind her mother with the tray. She gave me a half-veiled glance as she did so. Then, almost imperceptibly, she brushed her mother's shoulder with her lips.



And well, I thought, she might!

"Jennie been reading to you?" said Madge.

"No, we've just been talking."

"Well, you'll have somebody else to talk to the day after to-morrow. We didn't want to trouble you with the affairs of this world when you were at death's door, but who do you think's coming?"

I made a great effort. "Animal, vegetable or mineral?"

"Angel, whichever that is," said Madge.

"I've angels enough about me."

"Pooh! . . . Julia Oliphant's coming. So you'd better get your colour back in case she wants to paint that portrait here."

With which comforting words she took up my bowl of quite fresh flowers and marched off to get some more.



PART III  
THE CUT-OUT



## I

"But won't you find it a little cold?"

"Cold!" Julia laughed. "If Jennie can I can; why, it's a heavenly day! But are you quite warm? You're the one we have to coddle."

"Oh, I'm quite all right. Well, that's your tent, the green-striped one. I'll walk along to the rocks."

She took the escholtzia-hued robe and other fripperies from my arm, nodded smilingly, and passed up the beach.

The Airds and their set bathed, not from the crowded plage of Dinard proper, but in the quieter bay of St Enogat. The beach glistened with minute particles of mica, deposited in moiré patterns as the wavelets had left them, and to touch that sand with your hand was to withdraw it again all infinitesimally spangled. It sparkled like gun-metal in the rocks, floated in suspension in the green water. You would have said that the whole shore had been sown with that metallic powder with which children used to tinsel themselves at Christmas parties.

I crossed the tent-bordered plage towards the rocks. Already a dozen bathers splashed and played. Every contour of wet limb reflected the warm gold, every rubber-capped head had its piercing little flash of sunlight. I looked for Jennie's yellow cap, but did not see it; she was still in the tent whither she had preceded Julia five minutes before. But I saw the Beverley girls, of whose mutual sufficiency Madge so strongly disapproved. Jennie was not to be brought up on those lines. . . .

I lay down on a purple-weeded rock and watched the fruit salad of the bathers. Scattered over the beach where they had dropped them lay their bright wraps, the prints of their sandals patterned the mica. Tank Beverley's head could be seen, a dark dot a quarter of a mile out, and in the

green marge two little French children splashed, brown as nuts and innocent of any garment whatever. Their bare-footed mother knitted a few yards from where I sat, their father lay by her side with his panama over his face. The sun shone honey-yellow through the wings of the gulls, and far out a little launch crept among the rocks and sent its soft "thut-thut" over the water.

Jennie and Julia were taking rather a long time to get ready, I thought, and I hoped all was well. For Jennie, if the truth must be told, was behaving abominably. She was far, far too submissive and sweet and self-effacing before the older woman—altogether too good to be true—and I happened to know that Madge had taken her to task about it a couple of days before.

"I don't see why you can't call her just Julia if it comes to that," she had rebuked her. "She isn't a hundred, anyway. I do wish you'd stop saying 'Aunt Julia.'"

"I'm very sorry, mother darling. Shall I call her Miss Oliphant?"

As a matter of fact I had not since heard her use any form of address whatever.

It was the third day after Julia's arrival, and my own longest walk since my touch of illness. Without even changing her travelling-things, Julia had come straight up into my room the moment of her arrival at Ker Annic, and, kneeling down by my bed, had taken both my hands into hers.

"You poor old George!" she had laughed. "So this is what you've been and gone and done to yourself! Well, we must see what an extra nurse can do."

"Had you a good crossing?"

"Well—crowded wasn't the word; but two nice dear men looked after me. I'd a scandalous flirtation with one of them; oh, I 'got off'; he was putting my collar round my neck for me before we passed the Needles. And may I solemnly assure you, George, that in Buckingham where I've been staying a male man wanted to marry me? Fact. And when I said No-could-do he accused me of encourag-

ing him and left the house the next day. Such is human life so gliding on. Have you fallen in love with a French-woman yet?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, but they're so wonderful! They walk like lines of poetry. There was one on the boat coming over; I suppose my cavalier didn't speak French very well, or he'd never have looked at me with her about. I don't know though—it gives you a lot of confidence when you've been proposed to. . . . Well, I must go and have a bath and change. I only peeped in to see you. 'Après le bain,' as the Salon pictures say—be good."

And with a nod over the collar of her terra-cotta blanket-coat she had left me.

Of our subsequent talk about Derwent Rose I will speak presently.

They appeared together from behind the green-striped bathing-tent. The wind-blown wrap of escholtzia-orange and the green turban were Julia's; Jennie wore her white towelling gathered closely about her, and the yellow cap was pulled as low as her eyebrows. Julia is only slightly taller than Jennie. A good four feet separated the orange and the white as they advanced towards me. Julia saw me and waved her hand; Jennie made no gesture. Julia looked freely about her; Jennie gazed straight ahead. The blowing aside of Julia's wrap showed a short-skirted bright green costume with ribboned sandals; Jennie bathed in her plain navy-blue "Club" and her feet were bare. I rose to take their wraps.

Except for one piece of advice she offered, Jennie did not speak to Julia.

"I don't think I'd go beyond the point there," she said as her towelling fell to her feet. "There's rather a rip."

She ran down to the water. Julia turned to me.

"You all right?" she asked. "Here"—laughingly she took the vivid wrap from my arm and put it about my shoulders. "There! Now you're all comfy. That'll keep both you and it warm for when I come out again."

She nodded and followed Jennie. Julia Oliphant has very little to learn about walking from any woman, French or not. With her robe about me I sat down on the rock again.

Atrociously Jennie was behaving. She had been told by Madge in plain words that she was expected to bathe with Julia that afternoon, and she intended that Julia should be quite aware of the quality of her obedience. Even in her little warning about the rip at the point there had been a delicately-measured ungeniality, and their attitude as they had walked from the tent together had been—well, polite. She had now joined the Beverley girls in the water, and if Miss Oliphant cared to go beyond the point after being warned not to that was her look-out. She did not fail of a single attention to the older woman; but every time she vacated a chair or asked Julia whether she could fetch her book she had the air of saying to herself, "There, I did that and mother can't say I didn't."

And I suppose it does make you a little cross when you are sent to bathe when you want to be off somewhere on a bicycle.

Julia Oliphant had not bathed during that week-end she had spent in my house in Surrey. It had been Derry who had done the swimming. But I fancied it would have been different had she had that week-end to live over again. She had remarkably little to be ashamed of in the water. The long arm she threw out thickened, rather surprisingly and very beautifully, up to its pit; and the man on the boat who had shown the solicitude about the collar of her blanket-coat had been quite a good judge of necks. Jennie's glistening dark-blue shape seemed still coltish and nubile by comparison with Julia's ampler mould. But the twenty-odd years that separated them were Jennie's stored and untouched riches, not Julia's. It was Jennie, not Julia, who could stay half a day in that water and come out without as much as the numbing of a finger-tip. And the difference between Jennie's navy-blue "skin" and that other smart and tricky green was the difference between the young leaf-bundle in



its sticky sheath and the broad opened palms of the chestnut in midsummer.

As I sat there on the rocks, forgetting that escholtzia-yellow thing about my shoulders as the seniors forget their tissue-paper caps at a children's party, I pondered a resolve I had taken. Between Julia Oliphant and myself there had not hitherto been a single secret in anything that concerned Derwent Rose. But a secret there must now be. She might find out about Derry and Jennie for herself, but from me she should never hear it. Jennie was hardly likely to confide in her. Derry himself—who knew?—might. Him she had not yet seen.

But we had spoken of him, and almost my first question had been to ask her whether she had been staying on in England in the expectation of his return. Her reply had been curiously, smilingly nonchalant.

"No, I don't think so; not altogether, that is. What does it matter whether I see him there or here?"

"But you weren't seeing him, either there or here."

"Oh, there wasn't any hurry. It's only three weeks. That isn't very long."

"That depends. Three weeks with him might be a very long time indeed."

"Oh, but if *that* happened again you'd have told me," she had said, with the same off-handedness.

"I might not have done so. You left it entirely to me."

"Well, no news is usually good news. And I wasn't wasting my time. I did get a proposal."

"About that. And forgive me, because I don't mean it rudely. But is that a joke?"

"Not a bit of a joke. He did want to marry me. So you see that's Derry's too."

"What is?"

"*That* is. The more—let's say desirable I am, if I don't scandalise you, the more I have for him. And anyhow I'm here now."

"Did you ask Madge to ask you?"

"Yes. In the end I thought I would. There was no

hurry, but there was no sense in positively wasting time. You say he's at St Briac. Where's that? I don't know this coast."

"Six or seven miles. A tram takes you all the way."

"Then we'll look him up. But I want to do a bit of shopping with Madge first. Must have a couple of hats. I hardly bought a single thing to come away with."

And her manner ever since had been for all the world as if something was inevitable, would come of itself, in its own good time, whether she lifted a finger to further it or not.

It may sound fantastic to you, but I could almost have believed that when she had taken that yellow thing from her own shoulders and had put it over mine, she had invested me with something more than a garment, something almost of herself. I had seen Jennie's disdainful glance at the coquetry with which she had cast it about me; almost insolently she had allowed her own towelling to drop where it would; and Julia now enveloped me in a double sense. Cloak or no cloak, she claimed all my thoughts, all my gazing. For I and I only knew why she was in France. Her errand was the deadlier the less haste she made. I had sought to interpose between him and Jennie because Jennie was too young; could I now step between him and Julia because Julia was too old? Moreover, both women now knew his terrific secret. The exquisite complication I had dreaded to entertain was upon us in its perfection. What, between the three of them, was to happen now?

For Julia he was on his way back to sixteen.

For Jennie he hoped to go forward again.

Julia's influence over him had been to rob him of eleven years in a single night.

But I could guess what calm and healing had brooded over him as he had stood with Jennie in the Tower.

Julia had strangely made herself his scapegoat and had left him lighthearted, innocent, free.

Jennie knew nothing of this, and yet had an instinct that Julia Oliphant was a person to be kept at arm's length.

Julia was still unaware that apparently his years had ceased to ebb. Jennie, his partial confession in the Tower notwithstanding, was unaware that the matter had any great seriousness.

Julia had her knowledge of his former youth. Jennie was in possession of his present one.

Julia would walk through flame to find him. Jennie would do no less to keep him.

One drop of comfort I found in the whole extravaganza, and one only. Jennie's naughtiness might reach extremes of civility, but so far at any rate Julia was tolerantly good-humoured about it. For she could hardly be unconscious of the—well, the bracing temperature of the atmosphere. But how long was that likely to last? Once more Derry seemed to have us all entangled in the web of his unique condition. Already my own surreptitious visits to him had made me feel little better than a slinking conspirator; the presence of Jennie's bicycle in that St Briac kitchen did not improve matters; and now, to cap all, Julia and I were to seek him out.

Again I found myself weakly wishing that I could wash my hands of him. And again I knew that I could not. It seemed to me that there was nothing to do, not even anything to refrain from doing. The whole thing ran itself. It ran itself independently of any of us, as it had run itself with equal smoothness and efficiency whether Julia had stayed in England or had come over here.

And I sat contemplating it, wrapped in her vivid cloak, wrapped in her lurid thoughts, my looks alternately seeing and avoiding her shape in the water, while the sun flashed on the grapes and apricots and oranges of that fruit-salad in the waves of St Enogat's plage.

## II

They came out again, dripping, gleaming, Julia laughing, Jennie without a smile.

"I'll wait here for you," I said to Julia as I replaced her wrap on her shoulders.

"Right you are. Ten minutes. Come along, Jennie——"

The billowing escholtzia-yellow and the closely-gathered white retreated up the beach again.

In a quarter of an hour Julia returned alone. She sat down by my side.

"Jennie wouldn't come. She's taken the things in. George," she suddenly demanded, "is that child in love?"

I parried. "Is that a thing I should be very likely to know?"

"Then I'll tell you. She is. All the signs—every one. She can't sit still in one place for five minutes. Poor little darling!" she smiled. "I remember *so* well. . . ."

"Wouldn't it be better if you were to take a walk after your bathe?"

"What about you? Sure it wouldn't be too much for you?"

"I should like a walk."

"Come along then. I suppose I did stay in as long as was good for me."

A steep stone staircase descends between the villas, in the chinks of which hawkweed and poppies and pimpernel have seeded themselves. At the top of it a winding lane leads to the church, and from this there branches off the Port Blanc road. In that direction we walked, and in ten minutes were among cornfields and hedges, clumps of elms and coppices of oak. Ploughs and chain-harrows lay by the footpaths, and the sea might have been a hundred miles away.

"Sure you're not overdoing it?" she asked as we took a little path under a convolvulus-starred hedge.

"Quite all right, thanks."

"Oh, smell the air! This is a jolly place! Which way is St Briac from here?"

"Over that way."

The dark eyes sent a message. "Well, now tell me what his painting's like. I expect it's as wonderful as his writing was."

"It rather struck me—I don't know much about it—but I fancied it was on somewhat similar lines."

"What sort of lines?"

"The old story—starting anew from the very beginning of everything—nothing to do with anything else, past, present or to come."

"Of course he would be the same. . . . But now tell me—we've hardly had ten words yet, what with Madge and shopping and your silly illness and one thing and another. You say he's got to twenty?"

"Thereabouts."

"And he hasn't moved since—you know what I mean?"

"That isn't quite clear."

"What isn't there clear about it?"

"He thinks he's moving—he hopes to move—forward again."

She stopped to stare at me. Already the few days' sun had softly browned her natural milky pallor.

"He *what!*" she gasped. . . . "But that's wilder than all the rest put together!"

"It's what he thinks. There's simply his word for it. He can't explain it. But he's staking everything on it."

"Everything? What?"

"His future course, I suppose, whatever that is. By the way, has Madge said anything to you about him?"

She stared harder than ever. "Madge! Does Madge know him?"

"She doesn't know Derry. But she knows Arnaud. He's been to the house."

"He's been . . . Oh-h-h-h!"

You may call me if you will the most dunderheaded fellow who ever meddled in things he did not understand. I deserve it all and more. All the same I must ask you to

believe me when I say that it was not until that "Oh-h-h-h!" broke in an interminable contralto whisper from her lips that I saw what I had done. I had resolved that not one word of Jennie Aird's affairs should she learn from me. As much for her own sake as for Jennie's I had determined to spare her that.

And now I had gone and told her that very thing!

For the knowledge of it leaped full-blown out of that long record of her own heart. Jennie was in love; Arnaud had been to Ker Annic; therefore—she knew it, she knew it—Jennie was in love with Derry. How should anybody, seeing him as Julia Oliphant had seen him at his former twenty, not fall in love with him? Young, sunbrowned, beautiful, grave—only to see him, only to have him at the house for tea, was to be in love with him during the whole of the remaining days. Who knew this if Julia Oliphant did not? Jennie thenceforward would love him as she herself had loved him through the unbroken past. And if he thought his turning-point had now come, forward into the future again he and Jennie would go together.

That and nothing else was what I had told her.

"Oh-h-h-h!" she said again. "I see!" And yet once more, "Oh-h-h-h! I see!"

And, losing my head once, in that very same moment a wilder thing still rose up in my heart to crown it with folly. I forgot that between Julia Oliphant and myself there could never be any question of love. Little difference it made that I now loved her, knew now that I had long loved her. For me she could never care. Yet I forgot that. It seemed to me in that overwrought moment that if Derry really was right, and on the point of living normally forward again, in one way the field of the future could be left to him and to Jennie Aird. Julia and I together could leave it to them. She in my arms (I was distracted enough to think), Jennie in his, would at least cut the knot it passed our wits to untie. In any case Derry would never again look at Julia Oliphant. He never had looked at her. But I looked and found her desirable, as other men had found her desirable. And why

should not I too have whatever of good the remaining years could give me?

So, under that convolvulus-starred hedge, with that sweet air in our nostrils and the whispering of the corn in our ears, I asked Julia Oliphant to marry me.

Before coming out she had picked up and put on her head one of Alec's panamas. For the rest she wore a sort of rough creamy crape, with a wide-open collar, elbow-length sleeves, a cord round her waist, grey silk stockings and suède shoes. Little wisps of her dark hair were still damp from her bathe, and her skirt was dusted with particles of mica from the sands. Since uttering that "Oh-h-h-h!" she had not moved.

"I see," she said again. "I see."

"Then, Julia——"

"Oh, I see! I ought to have known the very first moment!"

"Then——"

She turned towards me, but only for an instant. Then she looked away again. "What were you saying?" she asked.

"Very humbly, I asked you to marry me, Julia."

"Queer," she murmured.

"Is it so very queer?"

She gave a tremulous little laugh. "The way everything happens at once, I mean. Get yourself proposed to once and you go on. I shall know quite a lot about it soon. . . . I say, George——"

"What, Julia?"

"How long ago was that—when he came to the house, I mean?"

"About ten days ago."

"And you there! What nerve! Did he let himself be introduced to you, or what?"

"He came up and shook hands with me. In fact he carried everything off very competently."

"Carried everything off . . ." she repeated, looking away over the corn. "And has he been since then?"

"We had tea with him in his garden one afternoon."

"One afternoon . . ." she murmured again. "How does Jennie spend most of her time?"

"I've been laid up in bed."

"Of course," she nodded. Apparently she passed it as a good man's answer, as men's answers go.

But my own question she did not appear to dream of answering. Except to compare it with another man's similar question she might not have heard it. Nor had I asked that question only as the solution of an otherwise insoluble problem. Happy I, could I have taken her into my arms there and then. So I waited, my eyes in the shadow of her panama, while she continued to look far away.

Then, "I see," she said yet once more. "Of course I ought to have known in the tent."

"In the tent?"

"The bathing-tent. She could hardly bear to share it with me. But she let me have the little stool, and untied a knot for me, and carried my wet things home."

"Madge Aird's daughter wouldn't behave altogether too unlike a lady."

"Madge Aird's daughter's a woman," she replied.

Then her whole tone changed. She confronted me.

"That that you've just been saying is all nonsense, of course," she said abruptly. "You know it is. What happened in July puts that out of the question once for all. How can you possibly ask that woman to marry you?"

"I have asked her."

"She isn't her own to marry anybody. And I don't see how Derry can marry anybody either. What's he going to do—forge papers, or impersonate somebody? . . . No, George; my way was the only way—take what you can while you can."

"Marry me, come right away, and have done with it."

She gave me a slow sidelong look.

"Is *that* the idea—just a way out for everybody?"

"Don't think it. I didn't begin to love you this afternoon."



"Proposals pour in—once they start!" she admired. "Oh, how little we know when we're young, and how much when it's too late to make any difference!"

"Julia," I said abruptly, "what do you intend to do about him?"

She smiled, but without speaking.

"Are you going to see him?"

"That's a silly question. Of course I am."

"Is it wise?"

"I'm not wise. I suppose I should be Lady Coverham if I were wise."

"What are you going to do about Jennie?"

"Oh, I shan't fly out at her."

"Marry me and come away."

She shook her head. "That's the one thing I *am* sure about."

"Then don't marry me, but come back to England."

"And leave the field clear? I see that too. Of course you want to give her to him."

"If you only knew how I've striven to prevent it!"

Her hand touched my sleeve for a moment. "Poor old George—always trying to prevent somebody from doing something! Has it ever occurred to you that that's sometimes the way to bring it about?" Then, imperiously, "Has he told you he's in love with her?"

"If he is in love with her, and has no eyes for any other woman living, and never will have, will you marry me then?"

"Oh, we had all that years ago. Has he told you he's in love with her?"

"Since you must know, he has."

"Now we're getting at it. I thought you'd something up your sleeve. Now just one more question. Do you happen to know whether he's told *her* that?"

You see what I was in her hands. She cut clean through my web of speculations as scissors go through cloth. I had resolved to tell her this, not to tell her that. The end of it was that I told her precisely what she wished to know.

"I've reason for thinking he hasn't," I said. "For one thing, he made me a promise."

But she flicked his promise aside as she flicked the convolvulus with her nail. She laughed a little.

"Anyway I don't suppose he has the least idea what's the matter with him. He never did know anything about women."

But ah, Julia Oliphant, whatever mistakes you made in your life, you never made a greater one than that! Me you might turn this way and that round your finger, but here was something beyond your knowledge and control. I knew what you did not know. I knew what had happened by those softly-illuminated cars, by that earth-wall at Le Port gap, and that other night when Fréhel had bidden the Crucifix move and come to life. It was not now he who knew nothing about women, but you who knew nothing about him. I grant you all your other rightness; I grant you that I had drifted and bungled as men do drift and bungle in these things; but here I was right and you hopelessly and irretrievably wrong. He did know about women. Books he had flung aside, pictures he would fling aside, for these were but the dust out of which that loveliest flower bloomed. He did know about women, and all the beauty of his strange destiny had now swung over to Jennie. He had passed with her into the Tower of Oblivion, and Julia and I and the rest of the world for him and her were not.

The Tower of Oblivion! It was his own name for it. Jennie had not understood him; the name had merely sounded sweet to her because it was his; but what apter emblem of his own life? To find this new and smiling love in the place so hauntingly whispering with memories of the old! There, in the very middle of the busyness of life, with a threshing-gin droning and the lad's whip cracking among the walking horses and man's simple bread making as it was made in the beginning, he had shut himself in with her and the blue heaven overhead. They had not kissed, but—only

to be there with her, only to be rid of the lie he lived to the rest of the world and to be all truth to her! . . . Julia Oliphant would but bruise her heart against the stones of that Tower, thrice-strong outside but impregnably strong within. God or gland, it vanquished us all. He had found what he had so long sought, and the sooner Julia became Lady Coverham the better.

I forget the precise words in which I reminded Miss Oliphant that I was still waiting for her answer. She turned on me with eyes that so kindled that for a moment I thought she had reconsidered it.

"George, tell me one thing. Do you really believe it—that his clock's really set forward again?"

I answered slowly. "I don't know. I won't say that I don't. Sometimes I almost have believed it. One has his word for the age he feels, and there's nothing else to go by. After all, going forward seems somehow more natural than going back. I've no other grounds for my belief."

Somehow my words had not in the least the effect I intended. Everything I said or did seemed to work contrary to my intention. I saw her making a swift mental calculation. She was a woman to be desired—very thoroughly she had made it her business to be so. If I wanted her, if other men wanted her, so (I read her thought) might he be made to want her. What stood in her way? A chit of seventeen in turkey-towelling! What was a trifle like that to daunt a ripe woman who knew coquetries with escholtzia-yellow bathing-wraps? If it only lasted a year . . . six months . . . the rest of the summer . . . the rest of the summer of her life. . . .

"Young and beautiful," she said softly with a quickening of her breath. "I remember—I remember——"

"Then forget. He'll never look at you."

"Ah, he thought that once before——"

"You brought him to the verge of ruin last July——"

"You say he's young and beautiful—that's what I brought him to—youth and beauty——"

“Unless he goes forward now—if he begins to slip back again—you know what he said his climacteric was—sixteen——”

She threw up the white-panama'd head on the long throat. My eyes dropped before hers, my question was blown to the winds that set the corn a-rustling. I told you at the beginning of this story that I had never married.

“And how,” she said proudly, “if he had it in my arms?”

### III

Whether Madge and Julia were friends because of, or in spite of, the differences in their nature, I will not attempt to say. In the situation now in course of development at Ker Annic, however, they struck me as not so much different as opposite. Madge's bark is always infinitely more terrifying than her bite; but the more mischief Julia meditated the stiller she always became, except for a little dancing play deep-drowned in her eyes. She had risk-taking eyes, and the expression in them, if you looked at her as if you wondered whether she had counted the cost, was one of detached surprise that you should pause to weigh chances with the gorgeous adventure plain before you.

And what a risk she now contemplated, certainly for him, perhaps more for herself! What the penalty of failure—or of success—might be to herself I cannot tell you, since I am not in the habit of speculating about what responsibilities ladies incur who love a man all their lives, grow up alongside him as a “jolly good sort,” violently assail him when he clings as it were to a loop amid the dizzy curves of his life's track, and then, when he comes to rest and again begins slowly to revolve on the turn-table at the terminus, put out their hands to the lever once more. What she had taken from him, what she had given him in return, were mysteries beyond me. I merely realised that, if she

undertook this in the spirit of adventure, it was adventure on a well-nigh apocalyptic scale.

But what about him? For him it was not a question, as it was for her, of a few weeks' madness and then a folding of the hands, the *Nunc Dimittis* and darkness. She would merely be putting the seal on a life that already anticipated its close; but he would be asked to cut one off in the very moment of its re-flowering. He saw ahead of him that boon for which humanity has cried out ever since another woman gave her man the Knowledge in the Garden. "Ah, might I live again knowing what I know now!" . . . *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait!* . . . He did know, he was able; and Julia Oliphant, discovering that she had done all for Jennie Aird, now sought to take it back again. For should ruin supervene, it would be Jennie, not Julia, who would now be robbed and wronged. I could hardly look at Julia, standing there by the hedge, without re-living those anguished moments in which I had ascended his stairs and knocked at his door, hardly daring to hope for an answer. He knew not that ultimately it was from Julia that he now had this manna and honey, this healing oil and wine. He only knew that he received them at Jennie's hands, and with this soft nourishment he had victualled his Tower.

So what disaster might not befall if Julia were to introduce that yeasty fermenting element of herself all over again?

Slowly we returned together across the cornfields, I and the woman who had hardly deigned to refuse me. Since our final rapid exchange, that had ended with her demand "How if he had it in my arms?" not a word had passed between us. In that one insolent sentence she had not merely put my pretensions out of existence: she had made them as if they had never been. That they could never be again I knew only too well. Therefore, in silence we passed under the shadow of St Enogat Church, crossed the little space opposite the Café de la Mer, and entered the winding lanes to Ker Annic.

At the gate of the villa Madge met us with a peremptory question.

"Where's Jennie? Isn't she with you?" she demanded. She gave a quick glance behind her as she spoke.

Obviously she wasn't. Madge glanced over her shoulder again.

"Then don't for goodness sake say she hasn't been. Alec's stamping up and down the garden—says she's been seen with young Arnaud somewhere at the back of beyond on a bicycle. I sent her to bathe with you, Julia."

"She did," said Julia quickly.

"Then just tell him that and say she must have gone into town or something. I know she has been back, because I looked into her room and saw her half-dried costume. You quieten Alec down, George. Have you had tea?"

But in spite of my efforts to placate Alec, I found the fat badly in the fire at Ker Annic. Alec raged up and down the pergola as if he had been caged within it.

"Exactly what I said would happen! I knew it all along!" he stormed. "Noble saw 'em—no mistake possible, he says—pedalling all over Brittany with Tom, Dick and Harry. . . . Where did she get that bicycle? I haven't seen any bicycle about here! First I've heard of a bicycle!"

"Simmer down, Alec. There's no great harm in a bicycle ride after all."

"If she's been for one she's been for a dozen for all I know. She was sent off to bathe."

"Well, she did bathe."

"Were you there? Did you see her?" he challenged me, now suspicious at every point.

"Yes. She bathed with Julia. I waited for them."

"You waited for Julia, you mean. Nipped in and out so as to be able to say she'd been and then dashed off with this fellow, I suppose. Look here, he appears to be a protégé of yours, but I want to know more about him before there's any more of this. What does he go about in that rig for? Why does he talk French like that?" (This last headed the list of his offences in Alec's eyes.) "There's something

fishy about the whole thing. Jennie sees him sketching, evidently doesn't know any more than the man in the moon who he is, and goes up to him and speaks to him in French and he answers in English! Then he says he's a level-time man, but touched in the bellows. He's about as much touched in the bellows as I am! . . . Who is he? Did he really stay with you? How did you get to know him?"

"He did stay with me. He's perfectly straight. Don't make such a fuss."

"Well, I expect Jennie's as much to blame as he is. They generally are. If I've told Madge once . . . anyway it's got to stop. Of course if he's a friend of yours that's another matter, but gadding about all over the place has got to stop. Is she back yet? I want to see her when she does come in."

And so on. I left him in his cage, angrily knocking out his pipe against the lattice.

The worst of it was that Alec was so very much righter than he knew. I had ventured to assure him that our young French-speaker was perfectly straight, and you know how far that was true. In the wider sense who was crooked, whose life more devious? Not one straight step did his circumstances permit him to take. Why, the only satisfactory way he had been able to hit on to provide himself with money had been his fantastic idea of fighting Georges Carpentier, the simplest way he had found of crossing the Channel had been to swim it! Straight? Too straight altogether. The world is not accustomed to people so straight that they go straight plumb into the heart of things like that. . . . And, merely as straightness, how was he now to acquire even an ordinary identity? Had he *been* anybody, had he in the past once possessed an identity he was able to acknowledge, ways might have been found. He would then have had a starting point. He might have invested himself with a name and place in the world by means of the French equivalent of a deed poll. He might have got himself cited by name in a civil court, have snatched a social existence even out of the formalities of registration atten-

dant on a State Lottery. But not one of these ways was open to him. Nothing short of an act of creation could establish him. Nothing comes out of nothing, nothing can be made out of nothing. Stronger even than that Tower of stone is this other invisible Tower in which we all live, each stone an ego, its mortar the whole complicated everyday nexus of the social fabric. All that he was able to do was to make assertion that he was Arnaud, and let us take it or leave it at that. How Alec would take it there was very little doubt.

Nor was there much doubt in Madge's case either. She might talk family histories and hidden scandals till the cows came home, but, in the end, the Airds' would be the last household into which any suitor would penetrate without the strictest investigation. Derry might palm off his Somerset Trehernes upon us during a casual tea-hour, but Alec would now dive into the last pigeon-hole in Somerset House but he would know exactly who it was who aspired to become his son-in-law.

Jennie appeared at about half-past six, and Alec's first demand was to be told where that bicycle was.

"What bicycle?" she asked.

"Haven't you come home on a bicycle?"

"No, I came home by the tram, father."

"Where from?"

"From St Briac."

"Haven't you been out with that fellow on a bicycle, or has a mistake been made?"

The game was up. "I did go for a bicycle ride."

"With that fellow Arnaud?"

"Yes, father."

"You went immediately after your bathe?"

"Yes."

"Where's the bicycle now?"

"I left it at St Briac."

"Where in St Briac?"

"At his hotel, where mother and Uncle George and I went that day."



"Where did the bicycle come from?"

"I hired it, father."

"In St Briac?"

"No, in Dinard."

"And you keep it in St Briac?"

"Yes."

"Why there instead of here?"

No reply.

"Why in St Briac instead of here?"

Still no reply.

"How often have you been for these rides?"

"About eight or ten times, father."

"Did mother know about it?"

"No, father."

"Then that means that you've been practically every day for a fortnight?"

No reply.

"Very well, Jennie. Now listen to what I have to say."

Enough. You see the style of it. Alec is an affectionate father, but, his grumbling indulgence to Madge notwithstanding, there are no two ways about his being master in his own house. The upshot of it was that a maid was to be sent to fetch that bicycle first thing in the morning, and back it was to go to the shop where it had come from. Further, if Jennie wished to see this M. Arnaud again, it must only be by express permission from himself. There was plenty of amusement at the Tennis Club among young fellows they knew something about, and—not another word. It ought never to have begun, but anyway it was done with now and need not be referred to again. She had better go and have some tea if she hadn't had any, and as for *thé dansant* to-morrow afternoon, if she wanted a new frock for it she might have one. Now run along, and don't be late for dinner.

Of the five of us, Alec was easily the most cheerful at that evening's meal. His duty done—kindly, he hoped, but anyway done—he talked about anything but that afternoon's unpleasantness. Then, rather to my surprise, about half-

way through dinner Julia began to second his efforts. We sat round the *Ganymede*, two men and three women, Alec between Julia and his wife, Jennie between Madge and myself. Everybody, Alec included, was kindness itself to the silent child, and *thé dansant* was talked of. The Beverleys were giving it. They had engaged a room at one of the hotels, and Madge had been helping to decorate that afternoon.

"Those were the Beverley girls bathing with us this afternoon, weren't they, Jennie?" Julia asked across me.

"Yes."

"Aren't they just a little—stand-offish?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice. Are they?" said Jennie dully.

"They're——" Alec began, but checked himself. In the circumstances the upbringing of the Beverley girls was not the happiest of subjects, and Madge struck hastily in.

"One gets almost sick of the hydrangeas here, Julia, but they're really most extraordinarily effective. We've put four great tubs of them, ice-blue almost, in the corners, as big as this table nearly, and against all that cream-and-gold. . . . Oh, Jennie! You know father says you can have whichever of those frocks you like. I should say the *voile*. Which do you think?"

"I don't care which, mother. My last one's all right. I don't want another."

Again across the table from Julia: "That's a darling one you're wearing now!"

"Do you like it, Aunt Julia?"

"Sweet!"

"And oh, Julia," suddenly in a little outburst from Madge, "honestly, now! Do you think I could wear those sleeves, or those not-any-sleeves-at-all rather—you know—the quite new ones, that show your arm from the very top of your shoulder? You *must*, of course, with your arms—it's your duty—but I'm not so sure about me——"

"Stuff and nonsense, of course you can. And I'm certainly going to," Julia declared.

"Bit French, aren't they?" said Alec over his canapé. "I've seen 'em."

"He's seen 'em, Julia!" Madge laughed. "Don't tell me after that that a man doesn't notice what a woman has on—at any rate if there's as little of it as there is of those sleeves! But let's settle Jennie's frock first. I think the voile. And you can wear a hat with it or not, just as you like."

"Would you very much mind if I didn't go, mother?" said Jennie dejectedly.

"Frightfully," was Madge's cheerful reply. "Of course you're coming. And all to-morrow morning we'll try-on, all three of us. So that's the voile for Jennie—and most decidedly those no-sleeves for you, Julia, with your arms——"

#### IV

The rest of the evening was the same: slightly false, slightly tremulous, a little off the note. I honestly believe that that "Aunt" Julia of Jennie's was a pure inadvertence, for she was far too low-spirited to be interested in anything but herself, her mood and her troubles. After dinner she went out into the garden alone, and Madge gave us a quick inclusive look.

"Don't worry her, poor darling," she said with soft sympathy. "Let her have a good cry and she'll be all right to-morrow."

"Let me go to her," said Julia.

"I really wouldn't."

"Very well if you think not. What about a rubber?"

So Alec and Julia took fifteen shillings from Madge and myself while Jennie got over it in the garden.

But I found difficulty in understanding Julia's new attitude towards Jennie. There had been nothing in the least degree hypocritical in her sweetness at dinner; quite simply

she had been nice and gentle with her. She had even interposed very quickly indeed when, for a brief moment, there had seemed a doubt as to whether Jennie had bathed that afternoon at all. But that she would hold unswervingly to her private purpose I was entirely convinced. Was her confidence, then, so insolently fixed that she had pity left over and to spare for this unhappy child who was to all intents and purposes forbidden to leave the house without permission? Could she toss her an alms out of her superfluity? Would her gentleness have been quite the same had she not known that that bicycle was being fetched back from St Briac to-morrow? Or would she, had Madge not stopped her, have gone to Jennie in the garden with some such words as these: "Cheer up, Jennie; you'll have forgotten all about this in ten days. When I was your age I had these fancies, but I forgot all about them in ten days. You'll be in love with scores of young men yet; nobody ever remembers any of them for long. Why, I've forgotten the very name of the boy I thought I was in love with when I was a girl. I can't even remember what he looked like. It seems hard for the moment, but it's over in no time. Cheer up, Jennie. There are lots of nice boys at the Tennis Club. Go and flirt with one of them, and forget about M. Arnaud. We all do."

Would she have said something like that? She was fully capable of it. At any rate I am fully capable of thinking she was.

But, whatever the circumstances may be, a man can hardly ask a woman to be his wife in the afternoon, have his suit treated as if it had scarcely been heard, and finish the evening with Auction as contentedly as though nothing had happened. Even poor George Coverham has his private affairs, and it was I more than any of them who should have found myself by Jennie's side. Indeed, as Alec and Julia divided their winnings I rose and walked to the window. It was dark, but not too dark to distinguish that she was still there, a dim white figure leaning up against one of the pillars of the pergola. A half-moon had southed, and the iron-work of the roof-ridge of Ker Annic showed sharp against

the silvery blueness as I stepped out. It had suddenly come upon me that if she needed my comfort, I needed hers hardly less. She was seventeen and I fifty, but that day had separated both of us from our desires.

She heard my step, but did not change her position. Anyway she had had a full hour to herself. It was she who spoke, and without preface.

"I wished you'd come," she said.

"We've been playing bridge."

"I very nearly didn't come home at all."

"Why, Jennie?"

"I knew I was going to catch it. Old Noble needn't think he's the only person with any eyes. I saw him too. I pretended not to, but I did."

"I was afraid it was only a question of time," I said with a head-shake. "Where was it?"

"The rottenest luck!" she answered softly and bitterly. "Nobody but that horrid old man on his motor-bike would have thought of going there! Right up a little lane, it was, and we'd put our bicycles under the hedge, and we were sitting against one of the stooks. That dark red stuff whatever they call it—six bundles together and then another like an umbrella on the top. He barged into one of the bicycles, clumsy thing, and then came to tell us that we oughtn't to leave them there in people's way. Derry shoved me behind the stook, but it was too late. I did think he might just possibly have the decency to keep his mouth shut, but I suppose that was too much to expect. So I knew there'd be a row."

"And of course Derry knew there'd be a row too?"

"Yes."

I sighed. "Well, the row's over now. Better let the whole thing drop. Your father's perfectly right, and you were bound to get found out sooner or later."

She made no reply.

But she returned to her luckless plaint a moment later. She struck the upright of the pergola softly and vindictively with her hand.

"It was all that beastly bathe and Miss Oliphant's being

late! We should have been all right if she'd been there at the proper time!"

"I'm afraid that was my fault, Jennie. I walked rather slowly, and Miss Oliphant waited for me."

"I know; of course it had nothing to do with you at all. . . . Then she goes and gets her things into knots, and I have to untie them, and that costume of hers is as bad as getting into a ball-dress instead of just a skin like nearly everybody else! Anyway the sea's there if she wants to bathe, and she can swim as well as I can if she does get into a current, and it isn't as if she needed a chaperone——"

"Jennie, my dear, be reasonable!" I begged her. "You can hardly blame Miss Oliphant for—for what your father was told."

"Oh, I'm not blaming her! But it makes you angry when stupid little accidents like those——" She swallowed.

"I'm afraid stupid little accidents fill rather a large place in the world, Jennie."

"I hate them having anything to do with me anyhow. And with having to take the towels home I only just caught the tram——"

"What's that?" I took her up. "You *did* catch the tram? Then it wasn't that that made you late at all. You'd have been waiting for the tram if you hadn't been waiting for Miss Oliphant."

"Well, I don't care. It's all—all——"

She did not say what, but hit the pergola with her hand again.

I was too sorry for her to be hurt by her words about Julia. That little slip about the tram had completely betrayed her, and it was against chance, and not against Julia, that she sought an occasion. Nevertheless the merciless mistrust of youth lay behind. The beginning and end of it was that she didn't like Julia, and her young heart had not yet learned the duplicity that makes us more rather than less sweet to those whom we dislike. She broke out again:

"And I *won't* go to that dance to-morrow! I *won't* be scolded and given a new frock and told I mustn't go out of

the house! Mother and Miss Oliphant can go without me, and when I get back to London I shall earn my own living and I shall be able to do what I like then!"

"Very few people who earn their own living do what they like, Jennie."

"Well, it'll be a change anyway," she retorted.

A cheerful call of "Jen-nie-e-e!" came from the house. We all used a marked brightness in speaking to Jennie that evening.

"Yes, mother—I'm only with Uncle George."

"Don't be long, darling."

"I'll bring her in presently," I answered for her; and we continued to stand side by side.

I suppose that ordinarily a man of my years would keep such a dismissal as I had received that afternoon locked in his own breast, or would at any rate hesitate before sharing it with a young girl. And I did hesitate. But trouble is mysteriously lightened when it is merged in another trouble, and to cheer Jennie up was the aim of all of us that night. And I think that perhaps the Jennie I wanted to tell was Jennie the woman, not Jennie the child.

So "Jennie," I said quietly, "you're not the only one."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I've had my medicine too this afternoon."

"Your medicine?"

"Oh," I took myself up, "not that kind of medicine. I mean that you're not the only one who's had to go through it this afternoon."

"I don't understand you, Uncle George."

"While you went for a bicycle ride I went for a walk with somebody else."

"You went for a walk with Miss Oliphant, didn't you?"

"Yes. And I asked her not to remain Miss Oliphant any longer."

I felt the eager uprush of her solicitude. "Oh, Uncle George! Do you mean you asked Miss Oliphant to marry you?"

"Yes."

"So you're engaged?" The words jumped from her.

"No."

"Hasn't she decided yet?"

"Yes, she's decided."

"What!" A deep, deep breath. "You don't mean that she said No?"

"I'm afraid she did."

"Oh!"

She threw her arms about my waist and held me strongly.

"Oh! Poor Uncle George!"

"So you see we're in the cart together, Jennie. I thought I'd tell you. I don't suppose I shall ever tell anybody else."

And I knew that I could not have told her three weeks before. That is how we with our belated loves strike the young—we of the Valley of Bones. Nevertheless my mother's embrace had been hardly more maternal than was the pressure of those seventeen-year-old arms that night.

Then, with another "Poor, poor Uncle George!" she released me. Her next words broke from her with a vivid little jump.

"Oh, *how* I hate her now!"

"Jennie, Jennie! You can't hate anybody I've just told you that about!"

"Oh, I can! Worse than ever! To think of her cheek in refusing you! She ought to have been proud—instead of playing cards all the evening!"

"Playing cards isn't a bad thing to do. I played cards too."

"Pretty poor look-out for her if she's in love with somebody else anyway!" she commented.

"By no means, Jennie. Other people than I are in love with her. But what I want to ask you is whether you can't be nice to her for my sake."

"I'll do anything I can," she said bitterly. "If you say she was awfully kind and gentle to you about it that might help a bit."

"Then let me say it. She was awfully kind and gentle."



"And so she ought to be! But *is* she in love with somebody else, then?"

"I think she doesn't want to get married."

"I don't believe *that!*" declared Jennie flatly. "Why, she thinks about nothing but clothes and who's watching her and if she's looking all right!"

"Is that being kind to her, Jennie?"

"No it isn't, and I will try, but I didn't like her before, and I'm only trying now because of you. Why did she ask mother if she might come here, especially if she knew you were in love with her and you were here?"

"I hadn't told her I was in love with her."

"Don't tell me she didn't know, for all that," was the unbelieving reply.

"Well, well. . . . There it is and we must make the best of it. You try to make the best of things too, my dear. Shall we go in?"

Whether I had done Julia any great service in Jennie's opinion was doubtful. I had at any rate given Jennie something else to think of. And that was something.

Contrary to my expectations, I slept immediately and deeply that night. It was nine o'clock in the morning before I awoke, half-past when I descended. I found Madge in the salon.

"I say, what's become of Julia?" she asked. "Though I don't see how you could very well know seeing you've only just this moment come down."

A maid was clearing away the *petit déjeuner*.

"Madam," she said.

"What is it, Ellen?"

"Miss Oliphant left word she'd be back at half-past eleven."

"Has she gone out? But we were to go into Dinard this morning!"

"She's gone to St Briac, madam, and she said as she was going to see somebody at the Golf Club she might as well save one of us a journey and bring a bicycle back. It

wasn't exactly your orders, madam, but there's a deal to do this morning what with this dance, and as Miss Oliphant was so kind I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind, except that it doesn't leave us much time for shopping. I shall go into Dinard, and you'd better tell Miss Oliphant to follow me when she comes back."

"Very good, madam."

"Anyway," said Madge, turning to me, "it certainly does save one of the maids a couple of hours, as long as Julia doesn't mind. But who has she gone to see at the Golf Club at nine o'clock in the morning?"

## V

The dances of my time were the waltz, the cotillion and the quadrille, and as I am not a Pelmanist I have never acquired the dancing-fashions of to-day. So I stood by one of Madge's tubs of hydrangeas and watched. The large cream-and-gold room had a glazed end that opened on to the terrace and overlooked the crowded plage below, and when I wearied of watching the dancers I walked out on to this terrace, and when I was tired of watching the people who moved in and out among the tents and umbrellas and deck-chairs on the beach I returned to the dancing-room again. And much of the time I moved about out of sheer restlessness and apprehension.

Jennie had come to the Beverleys' party after all. She danced occasionally with young Rugby or young Marlborough, but kept more often close to her mother's side. And Julia Oliphant was there, not dancing at all, talking to Madge only infrequently, but gaily enough to everybody else—with the single exception of myself, whom (it seemed to me) she avoided in the most marked fashion. As for the others, they danced in flannels and blazers and varnished evening shoes, and the Beverley girls danced with one another.

What had happened at St Briac that morning? The ques-

tion gave me no rest. Had Julia seen Derry? Idle to ask; of course she had. What had passed between them? Useless to try to guess. I had glanced at the Indicateur. She had caught the tram at St Enogat at eight-thirty-four and had taken the ten-fifty-three back, reaching St Enogat again at eleven-nineteen. Actually she had had two hours of but seven minutes at St Briac, and that was all I knew. Again she had seized her chance with ruthless instancy. Except for a night's rest, the very moment Jennie had been out of the running she had been at the door of his hotel. She had even had the effrontery to use Jennie's own bicycle as her pretext.

And now why, when I was in the dancing-room, did she seek the terrace, and why, when I went out on the terrace, did she immediately enter the dancing-room again?

She wore the sleeveless frock; and "Oh Juno, white-armed Queen!" I had murmured to myself when my eyes had rested on it. . . . But, whatever her other attempts had been, those arms at any rate he had not seen that morning, for the simple reason that the frock had only been purchased and hastily made ready on her return. But its purchase was not to be dissociated from him. With him and him only in her mind she had chosen it. What other plans had she in her mind? Was she now going to get a bicycle—she, whom it was impossible to forbid to see whom she pleased and whenever she pleased? Would she go with him to that dove-haunted Tower, recline with him among the sarrasin-stooks with none to say her nay? And would her hosts see as little of her at Ker Annic as I had seen of Jennie during the days I had spent in bed?

Dire woman—dire, and *capable de tout!*

But even my preoccupation did not quite blind me to the prettiness of the scene about me. Whether inside or out was the prettier I will not say. They had improvised tennis on the beach, and from the tall diving-stage forty yards out lithe figures poised, inclined, and dropped gracefully downwards in the swallow-dive. The brightly-clad mêlée almost hid the dowdy sands. Back in the dancing-room the tall

cream pilasters with the gold capitals supported the sweeping oval of the ceiling, painted with Olympian loves; and bright hair, bright faces, light ankles, passed and interpassed before the eye could catch more than a blended impression of the total charm. The band was playing that which these bands do play, the fiddler on the little rostrum alternately conducting and using his bow, and——

And this time I really thought I had Julia pinned down. Madge was on one side of her, talking with animation, and Jennie stood on her other side. Yes, I thought I had her cornered. She could hardly break away in the middle of one of her hostess's sentences. I advanced.

But she deftly eluded me. Madge had turned with an "Oh, here he is!" and in that moment Julia held out both her hands to Jennie.

"Come along, Jennie," she said, "if those Beverley girls can dance together we can."

But I will swear that it was only because of her promise to me the night before, that Jennie allowed herself to be led away.

I watched them as they stood balanced, bodies close together, foot alternating with foot. Jennie never once looked at Julia, but Julia's dark eyes smiled from time to time on Jennie's face. And present with them in some strange way, hauntingly about and between them, he—he—seemed to be there: young, sunbrowned, and beautiful as he had formerly been, young, sunbrowned and beautiful as he was to-day. A quartette seemed to be rhythmically balancing there, one of her, one of her, two of him.

Then, seeing my look, Julia frankly smiled at me for the first time.

Jennie also saw me, but did not smile. She would dance with Julia for me, but she would not pretend to smile over it.

Twice, thrice round the room they moved, the woman who had refused me yesterday and would not be denied him tomorrow, the girl who had glowed with angry compassion for me and knew in her feminine heart that that smiling

partner had not offered to fetch a bicycle from St. Briac that morning without having a reason for it. . . .

"A penny for them, George," Madge's voice suddenly sounded at my side.

"Eh? I was only thinking of those two."

"Julia and Jennie? I'm glad Jennie's come round and is behaving with something like ordinary decency again. . . . And by the way, that about that bicycle of Jennie's is a funnier mix-up than ever now."

"How so?"

"Well, Julia saw young Arnaud this morning. Rather a difficult position for her, and I can't imagine why she offered to go, seeing she'd never set eyes on the young man in her life. But she seems to have done the best thing possible."

"What was that?"

"She never once mentioned Jennie's name. She simply said that she understood that a bicycle was to be fetched back to Ker Annic, and as she was coming out that way she'd said she'd call for it. It seems to have been quite all right. He didn't ask any questions either; he got it out and put it on the tram for her himself."

"The same tram? She came straight back?" (I may say that there is only one tram to St Briac, which runs backwards and forwards).

"No, the next journey. It had gone, so she had to wait. She tried to ride the bicycle, but couldn't quite manage it. So he showed her his pictures, as he did to us."

"Before she went to the Golf Club, or after?"

"She didn't say."

"And he didn't even ask why the bicycle had been sent for?"

"Not a word about it. He just put it on the tram."

I can't say I much liked the look of this. I remembered how he had formerly bamboozled me.

"Then he simply accepts the situation?" I said.

"Whatever it is, apparently."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, that's the funny part. What is the situation? You see, Arnaud's knowing you complicates it. If he hadn't known you I expect Alec would have sent him about his business at the double. Not that you're to blame in any way; it's nothing at all to do with you. But then is Jennie to blame either for falling in love with the delicious creature? I told Alec so. Oh, we had a lively hour yesterday while you and Julia were out bathing and walking and enjoying yourselves! Alec blustered, and he wouldn't have this and he wouldn't have that, but I asked him, 'Where was the harm if the young man came round in a straightforward way and took his chance with the others?' 'I don't call this straightforward,' he said; and of course I could hardly say it was, but we've all been young once. Anyway, the long and the short of it was that there's to be no more bicycle-riding, but he hasn't forbidden her to see him provided everything's above-board and we're told about it."

"Was that a concession for my sake?"

"It's for Jennie's sake. It's her happiness I'm thinking about. You've nothing to do with it."

"Except to provide his credentials," I thought, but said nothing.

I begin to like it less and less. Not one single thing about it did I like. Julia was supposed not to know this Arnaud, but that had not prevented her from thrusting herself into his affairs and lying unblushingly about an appointment at the Golf Club seven miles away at nine o'clock in the morning. And if Madge thought that Julia and Jennie were "behaving with ordinary decency" at that moment, so did not I. As for Derry, honestly I was afraid of him. He had had a whole night in which to think over the almost certain consequences of that surprise among the sarrasin stooks, and if he was caught without a plan he was not the man I took him for. Julia might think she had scored during that hour and a half when he had shown her his pictures, but the change was just as likely to be in his pocket. Probably he had expected that that bicycle would be sent for before the day was many hours old. The only thing he could not

have expected was that Julia Oliphant would come in person for it.

Then the dance ended, and Julia, as barefaced as she was barearmed, came straight up to me, wide-smiling, daring.

"Well, George! Good morning! Enjoying yourself?"

"Hadn't Derry a nerve!" she had said to me when I had told her about the tea-party at Ker Annic. I don't think his nerve surpassed her own. I looked straight at her.

"Since it's good morning, come for a turn," I said.

Still smiling all over her face, she placed a resplendent arm on mine, and we passed out on to the terrace.

She wore an immense white hat, so cavalierly dragged down on one side and so arrogantly jutting up on the other that from certain points you had to walk half way round her before you saw her face at all. One eye lurked permanently within the recess of that outrageous brim. She had also done something to her lips.

There were little round tables on the terrace, and at one of these we sat down, vis-à-vis. She placed the backs of her clasped hands under her chin and sat there, magnetising me.

"Well, how goes it?" she said.

"I hear," I said, "that you're learning to ride a bicycle."

"No, George."

"What's that?"

"Not a bicycle. Only a free-wheel. I rode a bicycle years ago. It's only the free-wheel that's a bit tricky."

"You saw him?"

"Of course. Didn't Madge tell you?"

"And he knew you?"

"My dear George, do pull yourself together! He was expecting me!"

"What! By appointment?"

"No, no, no, I don't mean that. I didn't write or send him a telegram or anything of that kind. But, of course, he knew I was here. He knew days ago—before I came probably. What would be the first thing Jennie'd tell him? That they were expecting a visitor, but it needn't make any difference to their meetings. So of course he was expecting

me. Perhaps not quite so early in the morning, but oh, quite soon!"

"What I meant was, did he recognise you?"

"Recognise me? Why not? He called me Miss Oliphant and showed me his sketches. They're"—the eye I could see sparkled, taking in the whole bright terrace—"they're glorious!"

"What about the bicycle?"

"Glo—rious! He's a divine painter! Why, his books are like sawdust after his painting! I don't paint worth a rap myself, but oh, I know celestial stuff when I see it!"

"What did he say about the bicycle?"

"I didn't go there to talk about bicycles. I went there to see his glorious pictures and his glorious self!"

"And incidentally to meet an apocryphal person at the Golf Club."

"Pooh!" She took that in her stride. "But about those pictures——"

"Leave the pictures for a moment. Why have you avoided me the whole afternoon until you came up a moment ago and said good morning?"

"Surely you can guess that?" Again the fascination of the smile.

"Guessing's lost some of its novelty for me lately."

"Well, I wanted to dance with Jennie, you see."

"I'm afraid I don't see."

She looked at me quizzically, reflectively. "N—o. Perhaps it isn't as simple as I thought. But you were glad when I danced with Jennie, weren't you?"

"I won't say glad. I was—very interested."

"Why?"

"You two—and him. That interested me enormously."

"Well, now you've very nearly got it. That dance was our understanding, Jennie's and mine. We had it all out."

"You didn't appear to be talking much."

"I don't think we spoke three words, but we had it out for all that."

"That's the kind of thing I give up."



"Make an effort, George. You don't think I'd do anything unfair, do you? As long as there was a fair way left, I mean?"

"I don't even know what you mean by fair."

"Well, you're on her side, whether you know it or not. It took me exactly one tenth of a second to see that yesterday. You want him to get going straight ahead again and marry her. Don't you?" she challenged me with a brilliant look.

"Never mind my answer for the present."

"Well, you want that, and I want—something quite different."

"Jennie doesn't even know that you know him."

"What? How do you know what he's told her about me? Anyway, even if he hasn't, she knows I didn't fetch that bicycle for nothing. She smelt something in the wind, and now she knows perfectly well what it is."

"From that dance? Wonderful dance!"

"It's your sex that's wonderful. If you don't believe me, ask her."

"I don't think it will be necessary. There's just one thing you've forgotten."

"What's that?"

"Him."

"Oh, I've forgotten *him!*" she smiled, touching the reddened lips with her fingertips.

"Him and what he may do. I think you'll find you've left that out of the account. We shall see. . . . So I take it you dodged me all the afternoon because we hadn't all been properly introduced to the new situation, so to speak? Is that it?"

"Yes, that's quite good. There's no stealing advantages now. Everything's on the square, and what sort of a vermouth do they give you here?"

With that I asked her a question that for the moment surprised even her. I asked it perfectly seriously, seeking not only the unblinkered eye, but also the one within its deep ambush of white hat-brim.

"Julia, are you yourself in every respect the same woman to-day that you were before we had our talk yesterday?"

She turned her head to watch the tennis-players on the sands below, the swallow-divers from the tall stage. She turned it further, and her gaze passed from the clustered villas across the bay to the awnings of the hotel, the sunny white of the balustrade, the waiter who approached in answer to my summons. Then she looked at me.

"I know what you mean. Not just this hat and a touch of lipstick and these"—she showed her arms. "I'm the same, of course, but I suppose I'm different too. And I'm going to be different. Ask Jennie. She knows. Any woman would know—just by dancing with somebody and never saying a word, George. One keeps one's eyes open and—adapts oneself. Jennie knows all about it. Ask her."

And the flashing, daring, confident smile, which had vanished for a moment, reappeared.

It was her request for a vermouth that had prompted my sudden question. All at once I had found myself wondering who the man was, in Buckinghamshire apparently, who shared with myself the privilege of having been refused by her. Not that I was interested in his identity; but from him, or from the man who had been attentive to her on the boat, or from somebody else, or from a whole series of men for all I knew, she had—the slang is required—"picked up a thing or two." It was a far cry from that first cocktail in the Piccadilly to this hat, this revelation of arms, these conscious coquetries with bathing-wraps and auction with Alec Aird. Mind you, I knew as surely as I sat opposite to her that not one of these fellow-unfortunates of mine had had a scrap more from her than I had had myself. They had been dismissed without compunction the moment she had had what she required of them. On Derry and on Derry alone her dark eyes were unchangingly set. No trifling, no flirtation by the way, any more than to the rehearsal is given the unstinted kiss of the passionate performance. Therefore in this she was single and unchanged.

But she had seen Derry that morning, and that excited

bombardment of electrons that seemed to emanate from him and to alter the nature of everyone who came into contact with him had worked an alteration in her. She might call it "adapting herself," but it was essentially more than that. For she had seen Jennie too, knew of their love, and had instantly re-assembled and re-marshalled all the forces at her disposal. Whatever might be her broadside of hat, arms and the rest, swiftly and craftily she had seen that there was one thing she could not ape—the simplicity of seventeen. Contest on that ground meant defeat in advance. In this, its vivid opposite, lay her desperate chance.

And, I thought with apprehension, no negligible chance either! For a man may be young and innocent and grave and be entirely at the mercy of this very simplicity and trust. It is the woman old enough to be his mother, but not too old to have this shot left in her locker, who bowls him over. Lucky for him if a more contemporaneous passion already occupies his heart.

## VI

"So," she said, her eyes far away, "there are those wonderful pictures."

Yes, she would not hesitate to make capital out of his pictures too.

"The mere handling, quite apart from anything else——"

There again she had Jennie on the hip. Jennie might love his pictures merely because they were his, but Julia painted, knew the technicalities, would make intimacies, opportunities, flattering occasions out of them——

"There's one, just a few bits of broken white ruins with her lying there—he wasn't going to show me that at first——"

But ah, her eyes had spied it out, and he had had to show it.

"You've seen them, George. Now I ask you, *could* any boy of eighteen possibly have painted them?"

That too she had the audacity to claim—that he was eighteen when she wanted him to be eighteen and forty-five when she wanted him to be forty-five. Here again Jennie Aird was to be put in the wrong. It was to be an anachronism and monstrous that Jennie should love so widely out of her age.

“Could he, I ask you? Doesn’t it show? You were perfectly right when you tried to stop that flirtation between those two, George, and you’re absolutely wrong in wanting it to go on now. She’s no right whatever, and neither has he. Leave it to me. He called me ‘Miss Oliphant, but it can be Julia in five minutes, and anything else I like in ten——”

I did not choose to remind her again that she was leaving him out of the calculation. I had warned her once, and it comforted me to think that he was not quite so unarmed as she supposed against this sort of spiritual rape. . . . She went musingly on.

“‘Miss Oliphant!’ . . . But wait a bit. It was myself and Daphne Wade for it before, and then it was all sentimental association and stained-glass and church-music and because he was wrapped in dreams. Sentiment’s all very well in its way, George, but give me Get-up-and-get. That’s the cock to fight. Daphne euchred me once——”

“Where did you get these expressions?” I asked her calmly.

“——and she didn’t get him either. He never knew the first thing about women. So here we are, with the situation an exact repetition of what it was before.”

“With Jennie playing Daphne’s part?”

“For him. Why not? If he’s the same again he’s the same again, isn’t he? But oh, when I saw him this morning! . . . It was exciting and terrific! You’ve looked at a photograph-album you haven’t seen for years, I expect, but the things didn’t move about and talk to you and ask you how you were and show you their pictures——”

I couldn’t help a light shiver. Certainly this woman might

claim that she had lived through an extraordinary cycle of experience.

"So he's the same, and the same thing will happen all over again—except for what *I* do," she added wickedly.

"And that will be?"

She shook her head and pursed her mouth.

"No, no. I won't marry you, George, but I will be your friend. I'm not going to tell you that. You must wait. I see how difficult your position is, and it will be much, much better if you're able to say afterwards that you didn't know anything at all about it."

"Isn't it already a little late to say that?"

"Well, least said's soonest mended anyway. Got an Officers' Woodbine about you?"

"A what?"

She laughed. "You must get used to us young things, George. An Officers' Woodbine's a Gasper, otherwise a Gold Flake, otherwise a Yellow Peril, and therefore any sort of a cigarette. *He'll* know what I mean, and he'll laugh. He went through the war, you see. Oh, I shall be able to make him laugh all right!"

So she would reap a profit even out of the war. I could not deny her thoroughness. I gave her a cigarette, and as I held the match for her I saw that she made a note of my care for the brim of her hat. She would pass that too on to Derry as part of his education—that expensive hats must not have holes burned in them.

There were fewer bathers on the diving-stage now but the beach was as crowded as ever. Julia noted hats, shoes, costumes; she noted men too, but no young figure in *béret* and *vareuse* appeared in the rainbow-coloured coming and going below. Then the hum of an aeroplane was heard, and "Look, that's rather amusing," she remarked as there broke out from the machine, twinkling against the blue, a tiny cirrus-cloudlet of white that slowly dissolved and was borne away—leaflets for the races probably, or advertisements for something or other at the Casino.

We ceased to talk. For all I know she was revolving projects that included a new free-wheel bicycle, fresh from its crate, with packing round its saddle and string and paper about its bright parts. Together we watched the fluttering of paper melt away. A minute later you could hardly have imagined that it had ever been there. There seemed no reason why it ever should have been there. There seemed so little reason for any of our activities. Not one of those leaflets had fallen over the land, and had they done so, what then? A litter of paper from an aeroplane, a little of petty acts from a person, and the immensity of the blue persisting exactly as before. For the humming of that plane had reminded me of another humming. I remembered a Tower, with a horse-gin threshing at an adjacent farm. In that Tower too things had happened, so mighty-seeming at the time, so hushed in the empty cells of its stone heart now. I watched the plane out of sight.

There seemed so little difference between a handful of leaflets scattered over the sea and a handful of grasses seeded on that circular coping, as long as the eternal Oblivion of the Blue brooded overhead.

Late that night, in the garden of Ker Annic, there kissed me a young woman who had never kissed me before. She kissed me, and then with a sob fled past the dark auracaria into the house. The young woman was Jennie Aird.

The next morning she had gone.

PART IV  
THE DESERT ISLAND





## I

The Island is deserted only in that none but they come there; for them, just those two, it blossoms as the rose. Its story is the oldest story of all, and the newest. It is told an infinitude of times, and yet, like that first story of the cycle of a thousand, we do not remember to have heard it before. Let us listen to it just once again.

No coral-reef breaks its ceaselessly-thundering rollers into surf, no palms wave their dark fronds in the blue. Only a holiday-coast, with the London and South Western Company's steamers passing daily, and the known and familiar trees of oak and ilex and lime. No garments of skins and necklaces of shells, but a white summer frock, a grey rain-coat over it, and a bundle that can be carried in the hand. No shelter of stones and branches that he who is with her toils to make with his own hands, but French slates, French tiles, French thatching, whichever it may be.

And no wreck. Only the wreck of a home.

Yet it is a Desert Island none the less; a Desert Island with pleasure-steamers running, and cars full of tourists coming and going, and the Rate of Exchange quoted daily, and the sound of a familiar and friendly tongue everywhere. A Desert Island with guide-books and time-tables, chars-à-bancs, the vedettes up the Rance, the excursions to Mont St Michel. A Desert Island with cameras and picture-postcards and greetings at every corner: "I didn't know you were over here! The So-and-Sos have just gone to Quimper. We're off to Concarneau on Tuesday. Where are you staying, and did you ever know anything like the price of golf-balls over here?" All over Haute Bretagne the same, all over Northern France the same; and somewhere among it all a Desert Island *à deux*. Probably a

moving one, on four bicycle-wheels. But where look for it? In Dol? Lamballe? Rennes? In what *arrondissement*, *canton*, *commune*? There are many bicycles in France, but there is only one Island precisely like that one. For there is only one man who has been forty-five years of age and is now eighteen, only one woman who, embracing him, has made her fate commensurate with his own. They are apart, unapproachable, unidentified, not to be communicated with though you look into their faces and speak to them. Their nonentity is lost in the multitudinousness of everything else. They keep no signal-fires burning day and night for your ship or mine that passes. They are marooned in their own bliss, angelic castaways who will not return to us.

Only to see her, only to hear her voice——

Only on a fatal day to tell her his name, the name of that prisoner in the Tower that may not be spoken——

Only to send back a bicycle to a shop (but to trust her to guess that where a bicycle would be left a letter would also be left, and an appointment made at some secret hour between a *thé dansant* and bedtime that night).

Only to cut the knot that no power on earth could untie, to fetch that free-wheel back from the shop under cover of the darkness, and to be off and miles away before the sun rose again.

Was it well or ill that they had ever set eyes on one another?

And what the better now is Alec Aird if he does find them? The times have changed since Madge sat in her mother's carriage waiting until this servant, and not that one, opened the door. It is no good telling Madge he told her so. He can disown Jennie or he can take her back, but there is no middle way. The consul in the Rue St Philippe at St Malo cannot help him, and at the Mairie at St Briac they will run through the files of the *permis de séjour* in vain. He can whisper—he has whispered—in the ears of the police, and they may run the pair to earth, but it will not be to the earth of that magical island of theirs. And let Alec agonise in Agony Columns as much as he will. He

can forgive her, or she can go unforgiven. All else is out of his hands.

And yet it need be no long voyage to that Isle. It is to be found in the near and dear heart. But only by those who envy not and vaunt not, who suffer long and are kind. If sin there has been it must have been taken away again—*en souffrance, en espérance, avant qu'il est venu le jour.* But then, when that day comes, it comes as it were with a smile through the lashes of its opening eye. It looks up with the mounting rays, and its eyebrow becomes the arch of heaven. *C'est effacé, l'horrible passé. Il est venu le jour.*

## II

On a clear evening in the last days of August I found myself sitting in the Jardin des Anglais in Dinan, alone. The Airs were still at Ker Annic, Julia Oliphant still with them; but I, although their guest and under promise to return to them, had absented myself for a few days. I had done this as much for their sake as for my own. Alec was out all day, or if not out hardly to be seen by the rest of us. Julia and Madge were better together without me. So I had made no falsely delicate excuse. I had told them exactly what I am saying at this moment. And I think they had been grateful.

The garden looks east over the viaduct of Lanvallay, and above the misty violet that enshrouded the land a trail of pale shirley poppies was strung out over the sky—the leagues of cloud-tops caught by the last of the sun. The parapet in front of me hid all else as I sat. One or two people stood against it, looking out over the abyss; a few others moved slowly along the ramparts. The limes above me were already benighted, the dark mass of St Sauveur hidden behind them. The crowded vedettes had long since departed, and the comparatively few visitors who stay in Dinan were probably at the Café de Bretagne at the other side of the town.

The dark tangle, that for the hundredth time I was trying

to unravel, is almost impossible of statement, so little of the solid was there to support it, such mazes of spiritual conjecture did it open up. Once more I will do the best I can with it. Understand, to begin with, that he had now repeated what I had better call the "experience of the flash-lamp." Formerly it had been Julia; now it was Jennie. Therefore this, if anything, seemed to follow:

## THAT OTHER TIME

## THIS TIME

Julia . . .

Jennie . . .

The approach of the lamp . . .

The approach of the lamp

He had been greatly loved.

He was greatly loved.

He had not loved.

She was his very heart.

He had remembered nothing.

I knew nothing whatever about it.

But he had woke up younger  
by eleven years.

I knew nothing whatever about it.

Had ended in fluctuations of  
his "B" memory.

I knew nothing whatever about it.

But, save for that "flash-lamp"  
gap, his "A" memory had  
been unimpaired.

I knew nothing whatever about it.

He had therefore attained a  
duality of (approximately)  
eighteen and forty-five.

I knew nothing whatever about it.

But did he still retain it?

It was precisely that that I  
wanted to know.

In other words, the problem that had confronted me when he had disappeared from his rooms in Cambridge Circus,

when he had left Trenchard's rooms in South Kensington and had got to France by swimming the Channel, leaped upon me again on the ramparts of that ancient French town.

How old was he now?

But no, I have not finished yet. Let us take it a little further. The state of his memory at this point was a matter of the most urgent importance, since I now began to suspect that the whole of his chance of again going forward turned on it. So we now had:

<p>Julia had taken his sin, but not his memory of it, since he had cried out upon my cowardice in speaking of it at Le Port gap.</p>	<p>His cry had been immediately followed by an aching cry for help and advice.</p>
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<p>He had subsequently repeated a page from his book.</p>	<p>He had vowed that books had never in the least interested him.</p>
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<p>I had particularly questioned him about his memory.</p>	<p>I had not had an opportunity of questioning him.</p>
--	---

<p>He had promised to take no step without my knowledge.</p>	<p>He had taken a step without my knowledge.</p>
--	--

<p>I did not think that he would knowingly break his word to me.</p>	<p>He had broken it.</p>
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Do you see whither it leads? You do; but let me state it as it struck me, sitting there watching the shirley poppies in the east with St Sauveur dark among the limes behind me.

When you or I forget a thing our forgetting does not mean that that thing never was. Would to God it sometimes did! But you and I do not live backwards through our years, and we are dealing now with a man who did. Suppose, then, that this "A" memory were to go the way of his "B" one? And suppose in addition that, instead of merely resting on an even keel, he *should* presently begin

to forge ahead again? In that case he would once more be advancing on the unknown. His future to him would be what your future is to you, mine to me. And it is a condition of a future's being a future that it *shall not already have been*. What other future than that is there? There was no man living, Derwent Rose or anybody else, who had *not* a future. And when a thing has not been it has not been, and there is the end of it. He was, quite simply, and exactly as you once were, exactly as I once was, young with a single age again. With the disappearance of his last "A" recollection, past time itself was abolished. For him forty-five was not, and never had been.

And gone already was his memory of at least one event of hardly a week ago, namely, his promise to me. Nay, that must have gone before ever they fled, for nothing would have been easier for him than to send me a note demanding his release from his word. But gone how, and when? Remember, my own last actual sight of him had been by Fréhel's Light when we had stood by the Crucifix that overlooks St Briac harbour. My last direct word from him had been that note that Jennie had brought, in which he had reassured me that he was to be trusted, at any rate till I was out and about again. And my last news of him of any kind prior to their flight was that he had sat with Jennie among the sarrasin sheaves. Therefore whatever had happened had happened during the few days between his writing his note and Noble's discovery of them and speeding to Ker Annic with the tale.

I counted these days one by one.

On Wednesday he had written his note.

I had received it on Thursday.

On the following Saturday Julia Oliphant had arrived.

On the Tuesday after, the day of my first walk abroad, Noble had conspicuously failed to mind his own business, and we had all been set by the ears.

So far so good. His "A" memory might have broken down on any of these days.

And yet on the very next day he had greeted Miss Oli-

phant by name! He had not only remembered her when she had presented herself at his hotel, but had remembered her in the rather curious sense that, whereas she had formerly been "Julia" to him, she was now "Miss."

What in the name of the falling night was one to make of it all?

My hotel was the Poste, in the Place Duguesclin, and, though I remembered Dinan only imperfectly, it was for evenings such as this that I had come. It was a certainty that Derry and Jennie would never come to Dinan, where, when the tides served, half a dozen packet-boats a day might bring their loads of visitors from the very place from which they had fled. During the hours when the excursionists thronged the old town it was simple for me to get out into the surrounding country, to take an omelette at some inn or other, and to return to dinner. At other states of the tide the passage by river was impracticable, and few strangers were to be seen.

The poppies went out of the sky almost suddenly. Over the parapet all was a soft violet vapour. But when I rose and turned slowly up the Place St Sauveur my thoughts still gave me their shadowy company.

But one shadow was spared me. This was the fear with which I had mounted the stairs of his lodging at St Briac. Had he not been living, she at any rate would have been heard of at Ker Annic before this. It was for this that poor Alec telegraphed, advertised, instructed agents. Not that he must not have him as well as her. Though he showed him the door immediately afterwards, this Arnaud must marry Jennie first.

And the chances of tracing him were now far different from those when I had fruitlessly sought him in London, only to have him put his hand on my shoulder in a Shaftesbury Avenue picture-house in the end. For he had been a middle-aged man then, with all the bolt-holes of his successive personal appearances to dodge fantastically in and out of. Then, a night, any night, might have made him unrecognisable, nameless, a ghost among living men. But be-

tween eighteen and sixteen is no very great difference. He might be a little less tall, a little less broad, but somewhere between those two years he was cornered. His description was circulated, hers did not vary. They had been gone four days. Probably a week at the outside would see him touched on the shoulder in this place or that, a "Pardon, M'sieu'" spoken in his ear, and back to Alec he would go.

And though I have said as a foolish figure of speech that on that magical Island of theirs they were unapproachably alone, that was the important thing from Alec's point of view.

There is a little café tucked away in an angle of the Rue de l'Apport, called, if I remember rightly, the Café des Porches. If it is not called that it ought to be, for these Porches stride out over the pavement on their ancient legs of stone and wood as if to knock together the overhanging brows of their fantastic upper stories. Indeed one would say that the stalls and shops and barrows tunnelled beneath them had but a moment before been flush with those ancient façades, and that at a call the whole house had suddenly advanced a pace, and the next moment might advance another. And if you take a chest of drawers, and draw the bottom drawer out a little, and the one above a little more, and the one above that a little more still, and then set opposite to it another chest of drawers to which you have done the same, you will have the appearance of those carved and corbelled and enriched and decaying frontages. I passed under their trampling legs and sought my café.

I don't remember ever actually entering that café in my life. I preferred either of the two tiny round pavement-tables that stood one on either side of its low doorway. There was just room to squeeze in between the two portable hedges of privet that stood in long wooden boxes on the kerb; and from this seat, unless they happened to be coming towards you under the Porches or going directly away, little more than a glimpse of passers-by could be had through the narrow opening. If they happened to pass on a bicycle it was the merest zoetrope-flicker and they were gone.



I sat down, called for coffee and a *fine*, and watched the shopkeepers opposite putting up their shutters for the night.

One thing at any rate seemed now to be over and done with, and that was poor Julia Oliphant's desperate adventure. Poor woman, it was as much for her sake as theirs that I had left the Airds for a few days. Could she have done the same and have gone back to England it might have been as well, but that would have been to leave Madge insupportably alone. A single day in that daughterless house had been enough for me. The next morning I had made my explanation, had promised to return, had made a few purchases, and had packed my bag. Any news was to be wired or telephoned to me at the Poste. That briefly-concluded arrangement had been practically the whole of my conversation with Madge.

With Julia I had had even fewer words; for what was there to say? Even to Madge one could hardly have committed the grossness and superfluity of saying that one was sorry; what then of Julia? Was I sorry? For herself my heart bled; but was I sorry for the miscarriage of her vehement and tremendous attempt?

Yet how remember her as I had found her in the salon on the morning of the discovery, and be glad for Derwent Rose and his irregular bridal? She had worn a hat and frock of white piqué, but the piqué had not been whiter than her face nor the auracaria darker than her sombre lashes and ringed eyes.

"You've heard?" she had said.

"Alec's just told me."

"Of course——" The unuttered words were "with him."

"It looks terribly like it."

"Had you any idea?" This with a look so imperious that I was thankful to be able to reply truthfully.

"None. Is there anything—any little thing—we may do?"

"Settle that with Alec. I must be with her."

And that had been about all. I had not dared to ask her whether there was anything I could do for herself.

But if not because she had failed, at least because of this all-at-once dropping of the bottom out of everything for which she had lived, one heart in Dinan resumed its ache for her that night. Stratagems learned of any man, though she broke his heart with a laugh in the learning—and then to have her own broken! Arms to provoke the world—and no world to be provoked now that he, her world, had failed her! Nothing had been too little for her, nothing too great. Officers' Woodbines and her adoration of his painting, his years of war and a hat that hid one eye! What were those arms and shoulders of hers but his own gesture, ready to be given back to him, when he had shown himself in my swimming-pond, in that studio in Cremorne Road? How she had dreamed to glory in herself; what glories, for all I knew, had she not planned for the very next day! And all, all to have gone in the seeming security of that very moment when she had thought her rival out of the way! "New bicycles for old," she had planned, a new free-wheel with packing about its saddle and string and paper round its polished parts; but not a wheel would any bicycle ever turn now to help her. The last she had seen of this man whose destiny she had so arrogantly made her own was when he had shown her a picture—a picture of her young victress, lying among white masonry as ruined as Julia Oliphant's hope.

And even that she had had to ask to see.

The greengrocer under the Porche to the left was putting up his last shutter, the seller of hardware and Breton pottery across the way had already done so. Elsewhere from under the houses' bellies dim gleams of light showed as if through horn. In the upper stories window shone into window across the street—half Dinan is in bed by half-past nine. A priest in soutane and pancake hat hurried past, glancing into my retreat as he did so. Presently there was little light except that that streamed from the doorway behind me, yellowing the artificial hedge and showing the elephantine feet opposite—still where they were. Even this light was darkened as a couple of *convives*, with a "Bonsoir,

Madame," blocked the doorway for a moment, gave me also a muttered "Bonsoir," and mingled with the shadows down the street. I watched them disappear.

But before they were quite lost among the trampling Porches there cut across my opening, quick as a zoetrope-flicker, and with the single little "ting" of an ill-adjusted bell, a bicycle.

My eyes function quite normally; but they are not an instantaneous camera. In the tenth part of a second I had turned my head to the right inside my little screen of privet. Alas! Round tubs, with more privet, blocked either end. I sprang up, but the round table was in my way. I extricated myself just one moment too late. I stood looking down the dark Rue de la Cordonnerie.

But she had vanished.

She—not he; for even in that momentary flash there had been no mistaking that uncovered red-gold head. But nothing else had been familiar. A black shawl had enwrapped her shoulders, a green plaid skirt had made an irregular rhomboid from the saddle downwards. Her stockings were black, and white canvas shoes with jute soles covered her feet. On the handle-bar had swung a basket, with parcels in it and a bâton of bread sticking out.

They were in Dinan after all.

### III

In Dinan after all, and risking the visitors who arrived by the boat!

One moment though. There had been provisions in that basket on the handle-bar. If I myself could clear off during the busy hours of the day and take my omelette at a quiet roadside inn, what was there to prevent their doing the same? She had been "buying in." Possibly she was now cutting sandwiches for the morrow's consumption. Then, like myself, they would return at night, in the hour when the shutters were being put up, the Porches played heaven

knew what gambols in the darkness, and even the lights of the Bretagne were extinguished, the awnings rolled up and the chairs and tables carried inside.

Or for that matter, they might be in Dinan for the night only, and off on their bicycles in the morning.

Yet somehow there had been a settled look about that figure that had passed the opening of the privet and been gone all in a moment. People who stay only one night in a place usually have their buying-in done for them. And if he was in vareuse and corduroys, her own dress had been indistinguishable from that of almost any shop-assistant or ouvreuse one might meet in the town. In vain had Alec and Madge gone through her wardrobe to see what garments were missing. That part of his description was useless. Only Madame Arnaud's face was Jennie Aird's.

I did not sit down again. I called inside the café, paid what I owed, and walked slowly in the direction the bicycle had taken. There was now, unfortunately, no hurry, and I considered this direction carefully. Two streets led to the right, but one of these might be eliminated, since in order to take it she would have had to skirt the shadow of the Porches, which she could hardly have done without my seeing her. Remained the Rue de la Cordonnerie. This is a narrower slit even than that made by the Porches. The sign of a dingy little restaurant, dimly seen by the light of a lantern high up in the middle of the street, alone seemed to keep the two sides from bumping together. One makes one's way as best one can between two gutters, none too pleasant to the nostrils, and to right and left the low-windowed shops and eating-houses seem to have settled a yard into the earth.

Then, half way down this alley, bicycles caught my eye. The murky light from a half-open door on the right showed the gleam of a couple of mudguards. I stepped over the gutter.

The next moment I had cursed myself for a fool. The officers from the two great barracks of Duguesclin and Baumannoir dine at the Poste or at the Bretagne, but there is not a cabaret or eating-house in the town that is not nightly vis-

ited by the N.C.O.'s and men. To see half a dozen bicycles stacked outside a doorway was the commonest of sights. There were four or five of them here now.

Nevertheless I peeped through the half-open door. I saw a low smoky kitchen interior, one half of it like any other kitchen, but the farther end entirely occupied by a dresser crowded with bottles of all shapes and sizes and colours. A fat little woman in a blue-checked apron and lace cap was ironing; the rest of the table was a litter of képis, bottles and glasses. Through drifting cigarette-smoke men's bare heads showed, the red breeches of dragoons, the black breeches of infantry, and a couple of young fellows in horizon-blue, one with a steel cap on his head. No woman's bicycle was likely to be found among those heavy Service machines. I turned away.

So she had slipped me for the moment. But she was in Dinan. What to do now?

Wire immediately to Alec, I supposed.

But as I crossed the Place Duguesclin I had a better idea. It was the lights of the Poste showing under the dark limes that put it into my head. Charlotte might be able to help me. Charlotte was the little Italian-looking toulonnaise who served the cafés and *fines* outside the hotel and never failed to ask me how I had slept when she brought my coffee and roll in the morning. My French, I ought to say, though serviceable enough, is not of the same pure fount as was Derry's, and Charlotte even more than the other ladies of the hotel took the most charming and hospitable pains in talking with me. And I have always found that, whether in another tongue or in your own, a great deal of your ease depends on who you are talking to. What I mean is that Charlotte and I were friends.

I walked into the large public room where Madame at her desk was casting up her day's accounts. The chairs were being piled on the marble-topped tables, and through the maze of their legs I saw that Charlotte had not yet gone. That was my idea. I knew that Charlotte lived, not in the hotel, but somewhere in the town, coming and going daily.

I approached her. I will give our low and brief conversation in English.

"Have you remarked in the town, Charlotte, a young woman of such-and-such a manner of dress and such-and-such a face and hair, especially the hair, who buys her bread and groceries a little late at night and possibly on a bicycle?"

"The shops are closed when one leaves this hotel, M'sieu'," sighed Charlotte.

"But you inhabit the town. I will re-describe." I did so. "If it were possible to furnish me with renseignements——"

"Hold, M'sieu'. This lady is French?"

"Only exteriorly. Without doubt she speaks French, but as I do myself, like a Spanish cow."

"Non, non, M'sieu'," Charlotte politely protested. "But wait. She is alone?"

"She is with her French husband, the most beautiful young man even among the beautiful young men of France." (I was glad Alec was not there to hear me.)

Charlotte gave an exclamation. "Then it *is* they!"

"Ah! And they live——?"

"I do not know, M'sieu'. But Dinan is not very large."

"Neither is this very large, Charlotte, but it may aggrandise itself——"

And there passed between us certain pieces of postage-stamp-edging that united the filthy remnants of what had once been the notes of a Chamber of Commerce. I sought my candle and ascended to my room.

In Dinan! Well, it was quite like him to have cunningly read our minds, anticipated our conclusions, and decided that Dinan was perhaps not so unsafe after all. And his mastery of French would enable him to remain obscure.

Yet one or two little things puzzled me. Jennie's French, for example, was not remarkable; why then should he, able to bargain like a native to the last cabbage-leaf, have risked discovery by sending her shopping instead of going himself? Was another change coming? Had it come? Though it

could not now be externally a great one, was he none the less nervous about it? . . . But it was no good guessing. If Charlotte had any luck at all I should know in the morning. In the meantime bed was no bad place.

My room looked on the inner courtyard of the hotel. I was asleep before the lights of the staircases and windows opposite had ceased to flicker over my ceiling and the wardrobe-mirror at my bed's foot.

I awoke to the sound of Dinan's bells. At first I could not remember what it was of importance that I had on my mind. Then the mists of sleep cleared away and it all came brightly back. I dressed hurriedly and descended. Almost immediately Charlotte came to my table with my coffee and my news.

And I had been right after all. They were at that house sunk a yard into the earth in the Rue de la Cordonnerie where the soldiers' bicycles had stood.

"And the name of the proprietor of the house?"

"C'est Madame Carguet, M'sieu'."

"Merci, Charlotte. You will buy yourself a hat for Sundays, but the best in Dinan, it is understood——"

A quarter past nine found me at that low doorway into which I had peeped the evening before. Madame stood at the table, washing lettuce in a crock. I tapped and entered.

"Madame Carguet?"

"It is I, M'sieu'."

"I am a friend of the lady and gentleman who are staying with you. May I see them?"

She had kind, vivacious and shrewd little eyes, which seemed to measure me for a moment.

"And the name of M'sieu' who asks?"

I thought it possible that he might have left instructions about anybody who might ask for him. In any case there was nothing for it but to be open and above-board. I told her my name, corroborating my statement with my card. She wiped her wet hands on her apron and took the card by the extreme tip.

“Merci, M’sieu’. But actually it is that they have gone painting, taking with them the provisions for the day, as every day.”

“They will be back——?”

“This evening. Oh, assuredly, M’sieu’.”

Then, whether my manner or my card reassured her, or however it was, her face lighted up and she broke into a flood of ecstatic French of which I understood perhaps one word in three.

“But it is just as I said to my husband, M’sieu’—the fairytale of Cendrillon, just! ‘Vieux sot, but where are your eyes?’ I said. ‘Regard how she holds the fer-à-repasser to her cheek; did she ever before iron a chemise or a coiffe in her life? Look at her hands which hold the needle. It is not like you and me, ce couple-ci; it is of a different order. You will see arrive the coach presently—justement Cendrillon!’ Ah, the beautiful pair! And he, so young, to have fought through this terrible war! Mais oui, M’sieu’, c’est vrai—but necessarily M’sieu’ knows better than I who tell him. At first one would not believe. The poilus here, they would not believe. Who would believe? But mon Dieu, it is true! Our Caporal Robert, he was at the very places. It is correct absolutely—the regiments, the divisions, the commandants, the tranchées, the boyaux, the dates—Caporal Robert can verify all, for he too, he, was in contact with the English armies! To hear them talk of an evening, M’sieu’, yes, in this very room, while Madame sews or assists me with the ironing or no matter what——”

“But they have only been here—how many days?”

“Four days, M’sieu’—but we love them. Ah, the difference when such as they drop from the skies! It beautifies our life. C’est une fuite, sans doute, M’sieu’?”

“A little; but all will be accommodated.”

“You are a parent, M’sieu’?”

“I am a friend of the parents. I am un peu—ambassador.”

“And they will return and be pardoned?”

“It is what I seek to arrange.”



She had placed a chair for me. She herself sat with her back to the table on the bench that had been occupied by the red-breeched dragoons the night before I glanced round the room. Behind the open door the inner tube of a bicycle hung on a nail in the wall, and a bicycle-pump and an oilcan stood on a little shelf above it. Beneath the shelf was an empty space, more than sufficient for a bicycle. I saw now how I had missed her. She had wheeled her bicycle straight in and had put it behind the door, had crossed the kitchen to a closed door on my right, and had gone to her room—gone to where he waited for her, for he had certainly not been among the soldiers when I had peeped in.

“You say that M’sieu’ talks to the clients of an evening, Madame. Did he do so last night?”

“Last night, no, M’sieu’. One missed him. But talk to them, he! For three nights he has talked and laughed all the evening while she has assisted me. Talk and laugh? C’est à dire! To hear him sing to the copains—‘En France y a qu’ des Français’—la figure, les gestes—c’est à tordre!”

And sitting there she sought to give me the impression, singing his song in a cracked voice:

“A part les Anglais, Américains,  
Espagnols, Anamit’s, Italiens,  
Les Russes, Les Hollandais et les p’tits Japonais—  
En France y a qu’ des Français!

Ah, but he is an original, he!”

“But why then was he not of the clientèle last night?” I asked.

“I do not know, M’sieu’. Perhaps he was a little souffrant. It was Madame who made les emplettes last night; ordinarily it is he, and oh, M’sieu’, M’sieu’, pour les occasions! . . . She took her bicycle which reposes behind the door there, and was gone scarcely a little half-hour, and then she replaced the bicycle and mounted straight to him in the room that is above.”

“Did you see them go out this morning?”

“No, M’sieu’.”

("Then, *chère Madame*," I thought to myself, "do not be surprised if you do not see them return this evening.")

For this was newly disturbing. Apparently for three nights he had made the purchases, as I had anticipated he would; then on the fourth night he had sent her. For three nights he had sat in that half-underground room, laughing and talking with the evening customers; then on the fourth he had buried himself upstairs. I looked round the kitchen again. I tried to see the picture—the incredulous poilus, questioning, cross-questioning, demanding who was on his regiment's right, who on its left, what division was in support, under whose command. Quite possibly Caporal Robert had been had in specially to check his accuracy. What a stroke of luck for him that he had actually served at a point of contact between the British line and the French! And here in this room he had sat, pulling their legs, as he had pulled mine in the Boulevard Féart, Alec Aird's at Ker Annic. The cool impudence of his song! "Only Frenchmen in France!" How he had laughed in his sleeve! Well might Madame Carguet shake her head and say that he was *impayable*, he!

But—it (you know what I mean by "it") happened in the night; and what was the appalling position now that his nights were shared with another? Her too I tried to picture again in that lamplighted kitchen, clumsily sewing, burning herself with the iron, with the poilus, grave and respectful, but making the very utmost of their moustaches and stealing covert glances at her as her head was down hung over the ironing-board. "Une fuite"—obviously an elopement. Anyone could see that with half an eye. But to what had she fled? To yet another of his transformations? Slight though any transformation must now be, she knew every line of his beautiful face, and what must be her consternation, what her alarm, did but a single line alter, though it became more beautiful still?

And unless they returned to the Rue de la Cordonnerie to-night (which I now entirely doubted), what was the good of telegraphing to Alec?

"You say he is painting, as every day," I said. "Has he any pictures in the house at this moment?"

"Twenty or more, M'sieu'."

"They are in his room without doubt?"

"Oui, M'sieu'. At this moment even. After his departure this morning I did his room with my own hands."

"He sells his pictures?"

She gave a shrug. "That I cannot say. He sketches the clients, but those he gives away. Caporal Robert he drew as one should say himself, le Caporal, breathing upon the paper. Evidemment he has exposed at the Galleries. Are his pictures of great value, M'sieu'?"

"I am unable to say, Madame."

("But," I thought, "as it is a wager that those pictures upstairs and that bicycle-pump behind the door will be his payment for his lodging, it is to be hoped they are.")

I rose.

"Thank you, Madame. As to my visit to you, you will see that there is a discretion to be observed. I shall return this evening at nine o'clock. In the meantime it would give me great pleasure if you would share a vermouth sec with me."

But she was on her feet instantly. "Non non non non! It is I who should have remembered! We are going to drink to those two angels, but yes, at the expense of the house, I implore! Et quand la Carosse de Cendrillon arrivera à la porte . . . non non, M'sieu', it is the house that pays . . . ah, but what insistence! . . . Well, well, as M'sieu' wishes——"

She busied herself among her bottles, humming to herself as she did so the words of his song: "——et les p'tits Japonais, En France y a qu' des Français!"

I will not linger over the details of that day. I wandered aimlessly hither and thither, out through St Louis' ancient gate, under the grey walls of the Petits Fosses, back and forth in the shade of the tall elms, stupid with too much thinking. I could only repeat over and over to myself, "Another lapse, another lapse! That was why he kept to

his room last night. His landlady didn't see him go out this morning; she won't see him come back to-night. It's happened again, and he's off somewhere else. And she's with him. Poor child, poor, poor child!"

I lunched at the Poste, and in the afternoon walked again. But the brilliance of the summer's day was lost on me. I thought that after all I would go back to England. What was done was done, what was to come would come. The sightseers who wandered up and down under the Porches or gaped in groups in the Place St Sauveur seemed unreal to me; the shadow of what had probably again happened was my reality. Poor, poor child! She, our lovely Jennie Aird, to alight on a broken wing in that dingy kitchen, to sit among poilus, to listen to his mocking song! And he, with that shadow darkening over both of them, could actually find it in his heart to sing. . . .

The visitors descended the Lainerie to the vedettes again; the Porches watched them go; and once more I had the Place St Sauveur to myself.

Mechanically I entered the church. I closed the leather door softly behind me as I became aware of a small group a little way up the aisle. I slipped into the nearest pew, half concealed behind a pillar. Apparently a christening was toward, for a stout little Frenchman with a waxed moustache held a babe in his arms. He tickled the infant's chin and allowed it to clutch his finger, chatting and laughing softly as they waited for the priest. The priest appeared, followed by three or four acolytes carrying candles; he also laughed and joked and chatted quietly, while the cerise-coped urchins, their candles at all angles, shifted their feet, leaned against the font, and looked negligently round. There was an almost jocular intimacy about it all, until the priest, in a secret, attentive and distinct voice that nevertheless filled the aisle, began the Sacrament. . . . And I caught myself foolishly wondering whether that babe too would grow up, have something inexplicable happen to it, and set out on the return journey to the cradle again. If to one, why not to another? Why not to all the world? What was there to prevent one

of those inattentive acolytes having by and by the part of a George Coverham to play? Why should not that mite of four holding her mother's hand turn out to be a Julia Oliphant? Or those other wide-eyed tots be some future Madge and Alec Aird? . . . But it occurred to me that these thoughts would not do. All at once I rose and stole silently out. Even in a church there seemed to be no comfort for me. This time I took a long walk, I hardly remember where, and did not return till it was time for dinner.

I had very little hope of seeing the runaways, but I might as well keep my appointment as not. At a little before nine, therefore, I turned into the Rue de la Cordonnerie. As I did so my heart gave a leap to notice that the window over the low doorway of the inn was lighted up.

With my eyes on the light I moved to the other side of the street. Carved wooden corbals supported the overhanging bay, but the window itself was modern. The light was apparently placed low down, on a chair or on the floor, for half over the sagging ceiling I could see the enormous soft shadow of somebody's head. The shadow moved, and the somebody approached the window.

Then I saw the glint of her hair.

I entered the brasserie, bowed to Madame among her troopers, and looked inquiringly towards the inner door. She had a candle ready. She lighted it, opened the door, put the candle into my hand and one finger on her lips, pointed up a staircase no wider than if two interior walls had cracked slightly apart, and withdrew. I ascended.

Then, before I reached the landing, I heard his clear voice.

"I say, darling, what does 'béliér' mean?"

#### IV

The door was a couple of inches ajar. The clear voice continued. Apparently he was reading aloud.

"'Là était une tour dite Le Poulailleur'—(poulailler's poultry)—'qui renfermait Le Chat, machine de guerre'—(where

the Chat, a machine of war, was kept)—‘sorte de béliet à griffes pour les sièges’—something with claws for sieges—now what on earth is ‘béliet’? Seems to have been some sort of a battering-ram. . . . There, how stupid of me! Why, I’ve just said the very word! ‘Ram,’ of course. They kept the battering-ram there. . . . ‘On peut visiter dans une maison voisine le passage en casemate de la courtine’—sort of fortified wall, I expect—‘et aussi dans les caves de l’Hôtel de la Poste’—and also in the cellars of the Hôtel de la Poste——”

Thereupon I pushed and entered.

He was sitting on a long, low chest, the sort of thing corn or flour would be kept in, with the single candle by his side. In his hand was the paper-covered guide-book from which he was laboriously reading. The little table at which she stood was pushed up against the wall just beyond him; she was preparing their supper. A long roll was tucked under her left arm, and she spread the butter from a little casserole. A paper of sausage was before her, with two of Madame’s glasses and a bottle of milk. In the corner by the window stood a bed with a draped canopy and a crimson coverlet that resembled a soufflé. Had you put a marble down on that ancient floor heaven knows where it would have come to rest, for the whole room was warped and distorted, as if indeed it had just retired panting from its struggle with the house across the street. Under the window his canvases were stacked. Near the bed’s head hung a single devotional picture, a Virgin and Child in blue and white and gilt. The bed had to be where it was because of the window on the other side of the way.

Then, before I could make my presence known, he flung the guide-book across the room, sprang to his feet, opened his arms wide, ran towards her, and clasped her rapturously to him.

“Oh, darling, darling! Isn’t it simply ripping—*ripping!*”

I have never heard such a cry of pure happiness from human throat. He made no attempt to kiss her; some far, far deeper joy seemed to possess them. I had the most vivid

impression that this was not the first nor the second nor the tenth time that day they had clasped like that. He was laughing down at her, she laughing softly back. She was fresh and fair as a jonquil—yes, jonquil-hued even to her little gilding of freckles, as if the flower's heart had burst with a happiness like their own, and spread its golden dust around. And they seemed to adore, not so much one another, as some wondrous secret that existed between them.

Then suddenly I saw her stiffen. She had seen me, and he had seen the look in her eyes. Both heads turned swiftly, and they severed. I did not move.

Then slowly my eyes moved from her face to his.

Not a trace of change could I distinguish. He was young, not too young, grave, and filled with some exaltation that did not quite leave him as our eyes looked into one another's.

"I must beg your pardon," I muttered.

He advanced towards me. "Why—Sir George!"

Then swiftly he glanced at her, she as swiftly at him.

The next moment her cheek was against my breast.

"Are they here?" she murmured in a failing voice.

I did not pretend not to understand. "No, Jennie, I'm here alone."

"How did you know we were here?"

"I'm staying in Dinan for a few days. I saw you last night."

She lifted her head. Again their eyes sought one another's. There was something they were aching to communicate.

The room had two chairs, one a church chair with a rush bottom, the other a straight-backed piece of carved Breton work, but so old that its colour had become a dry dusty grey. He placed this chair for me, and sat down again on the cornbin. He was softly kneading his brown hands, as I had formerly seen him do in Cambridge Circus. It is odd how these tricks cling to one.

Then, his face again transfigured with that undivulged joy they shared, he looked up at me. Jennie was back at her buttering again; apparently he was to do the telling. I

noticed that at any rate he had not forgotten to buy her a ring. He caught my glance at it, and nodded joyously.

"That's it," he said.

Once before he had asked me to talk French to him. I now had a reason for speaking it unasked.

"Qu'est-ce que veut dire——" I said.

He laughed aloud.

"That's all right—you can talk English! Can't he talk English, Jennie?"

Jennie nodded.

"Suppose you talk it," I said.

"Rather! I'm going to tell him, Jennie. . . . English? Why, that's the whole thing! Yesterday morning when I woke up"—he glanced towards the bed by the window—"I hardly dared to believe it! They were talking down in the street or somewhere, and all at once I wondered—what I mean is that I couldn't quite catch it. It all seemed so quick and difficult, just a lot of jabbering. Not a bit like we learned it: 'Je veux une plume, de l'encre et du papier'—you know. So I lay there thinking, looking up at the ceiling. Then I had an idea. I got quietly out of bed and went to the door there." He nodded in the direction of the door now. "I opened the door and called down to Madame. I've done that every morning for café-au-lait, you see. Now here's the point."

He emphasised the point with a forefinger.

"There's a Breton word for café-au-lait. Don't ask me what it is; I don't ever want to hear it again. Anyway, I'd used that word for three mornings, and that morning I couldn't remember it for the life of me. I thought perhaps if I just went to the door and called without stopping to think it might come of itself, but not it! I had to ask for café-au-lait, and of course up it came all right. . . .

"Well, I didn't say a word to Jennie. We got up and went out sketching. But forgetting that word, and all the French I heard sounding so awfully funny and foreign, was on my mind all the time. And the next thing was that I forgot the word for willow—I happened to be sketching



some willows. Couldn't think of the French for willow. And all day it was the same. Some people came and looked over my shoulder while I was painting, but all I could make out was the word 'Salon,' and, of course, that's just as much English as French.

"Then I started talking bits of French to Jennie, and she got a bit cross—didn't you, sweetheart? She thought I was pulling her leg about her own French. And so it went on all day, and me getting more and more excited about it. Then at night I told Jennie all about it. I told her she'd have to go out and do the shopping, because I simply daren't. I'd had little jokes with the shop people, you see, and I thought to myself, 'By Jove, if they joke back now I shan't have a word to say!' You see what I'm getting at, don't you?"

Dismay filled my heart. So this was the magnificent news that had thrown them so ecstatically into one another's arms! This was what had happened in the night this time! He, who the evening before had sung to the poilus downstairs, had had to send her to do their shopping! Little enough to rejoice over, I thought. But he went on.

"Then to-night, just before you came in, it happened again. Some French word or other, quite a simple one—I just couldn't remember the English for it. It was hardly a moment before you came in. I tell you it's all going away from me by leaps and bounds. Even when I know the words my tongue won't pronounce them properly. And then you came in. You see what it means, don't you?"

"What does it mean?" I managed to ask. It seemed to me to mean only one thing—the beginning of the end.

"What does it mean?" he exulted. "Why, it means that I'm simply *me*—just myself and none of this beastly Arnaud business—a fresh start it means."

I glanced at Jennie. "I wonder whether you'd mind getting another glass and letting me share your milk," I said.

Then, when the door had closed behind her, "This is simply the old thing over again, Derry. You've talked about fresh starts before."

He laughed. "Is that all you sent her out for? She knows all about it. Of course I really started some time ago. I think I told you so. All I'm telling you this for now is because it absolutely clinches it!"

"How does forgetting clinch anything?"

"Because it *is* forgetting!" he cried triumphantly, echoing and confirming my own abstruse meditation as I had watched the shirley poppies over the ramparts. "I say, I mustn't shout, though. I'm not supposed to know any English except the few words Jennie's taught me. Great jokes we've had about that! So doesn't this prove it? Why, what am I doing remembering things all that time ago? I'm not perfectly right till I've forgotten every single thing! And I'm forgetting without trying; you can't try to forget. Heaps of things have gone besides French—heaps of English things. Why, I've forgotten——"

"You remember me?"

"Yes. I met you at the Airds. I told you the whole story out at Le Port one night. You can't have forgotten!"

"Hadn't we met before then?"

"Yes, I think we had. There was a pond, wasn't there? Wasn't it at some house with a pond?"

"Do you remember a Miss Oliphant?"

"Oliphant? Yes—wait a bit—yes I do. I'd met her somewhere or other too. But the last time I saw her was when she came for a bicycle. Why they should have sent her I don't know, but of course I knew there was a storm blowing up, so I simply gave her the bicycle and showed her a few sketches, and let it go at that."

"You don't remember where you'd met her before, do you?"

"I know it was in England somewhere. But I didn't know you knew her till Jennie told me."

"You really didn't know I knew Miss Oliphant?"

"Honestly I didn't, Sir George."

I was silent as Jennie reappeared.

And yet, if she knew all, as he said, why the caution of silence? It seemed to me that with the clearing up of one

other point I should have an idea of how matters really stood. I turned to Jennie.

"Derry's still talking about the great news," I said. "He says you know all about it. Well, I want you to tell me one thing. Does he remember everything that's happened since he first saw you?"

Derry answered for her, with a soft laugh. "Do I remember that! Why, it's all I'm going to know presently!"

"Has your 'B' memory quite gone?"

"Quite, so far as I can say."

"And your 'A' is going, and you're starting a brand-new one from the moment you met Jennie?"

"Not 'met.' 'Saw.' That's it exactly. Couldn't have been better put."

"And"—I hesitated, but took my fence—"that's all? Nothing else has gone?"

"What do you mean, Sir George? Only the remembered things are going. *I'm* the same, if that's what you mean."

"The same that you always were?"

"Well"—he made a simple gesture with his open hands—"if I don't remember what I was I can't very well tell that, can I?"

"You still do a little, but it's going, and soon you won't at all?"

"Exactly. *Now* do you see what I mean?"

It was impossible to believe that even unconsciously he was lying. I remembered his own trouble and unbelief when it had first occurred to him that this astounding development might lie ahead. Wistfully he had put it aside as too dazzling to be entertained. "I suppose that's too much to expect," he had sighed as he had put it from him. But now, unless he was lying to me, to Jennie, and to himself, he certainly seemed to have the proof of it. His face had been puzzled candour itself when I had put my sudden questions: Had he and I met before, and did he know a Miss Oliphant? Vaguely he remembered a pond, vaguely a Miss Oliphant in England; and to-morrow he was not going to remember either. My hazardous surmise as I had watched the shirley

poppies was justified, my fears for the breaking-up of his faculties groundless. This was not the break-up, but the very confirmation of those faculties, the complete washing-out of everything *not* inherent in himself. What next happened in the night would be what happens to every one of us every night—the gentle and beautiful small forward step to age. He was all but at the maximum of his unassisted, unhindered power, a white page on which to write anew.

And what a lovely manuscript might it not now be made! His schooling, the rudiments he had formerly acquired up to the age of sixteen, he would probably retain; but thereafter his life dated from a certain moment when, by the upcast glow of the headlights of a French car, he had seen Jennie Aird's eyes looking into his. He even spoke as if his talk with me that night by Le Port gap had been the beginning of his confidence in me. Not a suspicion did he seem to have that he had made similar confidences before, in his rooms in Cambridge Circus, in that loft over a South Kensington mews. That meeting of eyes across the car—that swift "Who was that with you in the garden, George?"—his wily shepherding of me into the Dinard Bazaar—his surreptitious meetings with her, and his last crowning escapade—these made up the whole history of his re-created life. Within this perfect period he had forgotten nothing . . . but yes, he had forgotten one thing. This was his promise to me. And very likely he had not forgotten that at all. The chances were that he had knowingly and deliberately broken his word. And what of it? Who was I to have extorted it from him? Could I reproach him with that—now? Is the law so hard? Shall we add to the tortures of Tantalus the unbinding of his hands, and forbid him to seize the fruit he thirsts for? Let him cut the knot and take his joy! At the worst he had merely omitted to send me a note releasing himself. And should I speak of that—now?

So, if he was eighteen, seventeen, sixteen, he was—simply—eighteen or seventeen or sixteen. What, by that fact, mattered his birth-certificate? If he was not the age he was,

what age was he? How old are you? how old am I? We are as old as our knowledge of ourselves. *Had* his faculties been impaired—ah, that would have been another matter. But out of that ancient mould of his former history a new sprout had pushed, sweet, vigorous, and identical with itself. That shoot was Derwent Rose. If it was not Derwent Rose where then was Derwent Rose? No Derwent Rose had died. If you would find him you must seek him among the living. Or if any Derwent Rose had died, it was the author of *The Hands of Esau* and *The Vicarage of Bray*. Dead indeed he might be; for no link now existed between him and his youth, unlettered in anything but the perfection of a beautiful love. He stood in that sagging room in the Rue de la Cordonnerie, what he was and nothing else. He had been it as long as he had been it, and neither more time nor less. No power on earth could make it otherwise. No power in heaven would have tried.

“Well, what’s to be done?” I asked presently.

We were all three sitting on the corn-bin, they together, I nearest the table. They were munching their bread and sausage.

“That’s perfectly simple,” said Derry. “As I’ve told you, that silly Arnaud business is all over. I’m Derwent Rose. Nobody can say I’m impersonating him, can they? So I must *be* him, and if I’m him it’s just like anybody else being themselves. And I’m awfully sorry it had to be tip-and-run, but there wasn’t anything else for it at the time. But that’s all over. I’ve got that beastly memory nearly off my shoulders. I don’t know anybody in England. I remember our own village of course—in Sussex it was—and a few odds and ends—and oh!” He slapped his knee. “*That’s* where I heard the name Oliphant! I didn’t know Miss Oliphant in England at all. There’s a little Julia Oliphant, but she’s only a kid, and no relation at all probably. But this one’s a bit like what I could imagine little Julia growing up to be. Never mind. What I want to ask you now is about Jennie’s people.”

“Yes, Jennie’s people,” I said.

## V

It was the drop of gall in the honey of her happiness. She would cut his bread and sausage, learn to darn his socks, sew on his buttons, wash out his handkerchiefs for him; that her hands as well as her heart should serve and adore him was all her joy; but I saw the droop of her head and the tremor of that upturned lip that betrayed the pearls. Julia Oliphant might hardly dare, but this one—ah, she was so recently a child! I think she would even have left Derry's side for ten minutes might they but have been spent with her mother's arms about her and the smell of her father's pipe not far away. I don't know whether a tear had ever dropped on to that ironing-board of Madame's downstairs. I saw one drop now.

"Yes, Jennie's people," I said again. "I suppose you want to know about them?"

I saw no harm in reminding him, at any rate, that however great things might be happening to him, minor but still important ones were happening simultaneously elsewhere. Even when you start a new life under the shadow of an old one you cannot entirely escape the world and its ordinary responsibilities.

"Of course we do," he said, surprised. "I'm going to them the moment things are shipshape again."

"You may see them even sooner than that. I need hardly tell you I shall have to wire to them immediately."

He sighed a little. "Well, I suppose the music's got to be faced," he said quietly.

"You're not going to try to give me the slip, are you?"

Again the surprised look. "Of course not. What have I just been telling you? That's the whole idea. If all goes as it is going a couple of days might put the stopper on this memory business once for all. Then we shall go to them at once. I want to get it over."

I looked around the room again. Practically upon the window-sill of it somebody across the street was preparing

for bed. In order to get to that upper chamber of theirs at all one had to pass through the public room downstairs. Everything about the place sighed with age and indefinable odour; one knew not what mould, what sweating life, what "silver fishes," those tired old walls did not harbour. I don't think I am too fastidious, but that was no place for that jonquil, Jennie Aird.

"Look here, Derry," I said suddenly, "if it's a fair question, how much money have you got?"

He looked serious. "Awfully little I'm afraid. And I don't know where I'm going to get any either."

"Haven't you any—put away anywhere?"

"No."

"What have you been living on?"

"What's left of that five hundred francs you were so good as to lend me—that and a couple of sketches I sold to a fellow at St Briac. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for that five hundred, Sir George."

"Let me see. When did I lend it to you?"

"While I was at St Briac, you remember."

He had forgotten it was his own money. I rose from the corn-bin.

"Very well. You say you're not going to give me the slip, and that you're going to Jennie's people the moment things are all right. Will you as a first step settle up here and come along with me to my hotel now? You came here to lie doggo. That's all over. This is no place for either of you."

He blushed with embarrassment. He hesitated. But evidently the problem had been worrying him, for he looked frankly up.

"I will on one condition, Sir George. That is that it's added to the five hundred. I shall be selling my sketches presently if you can wait a bit. You're quite right; Jennie oughtn't to be here. But I hope the Poste isn't too expensive. I shall have to pay you back sooner or later."

"Well, that can stand over for the present. Come and see the curtain-wall or whatever it is in the cellars of the

Hôtel de la Poste. Come now. You can fetch your canvases to-morrow. Get your things on, Jennie."

"They are on," said Jennie.

"Then just let me leave you for a minute or two."

I passed down that fissure of a staircase again, opened the door of the cabaret, and beckoned to Madame. There, at the foot of the stairs, and in complete darkness except for the inch that the door was left open, we had our low conversation.

"Tout va bien, M'sieu'?" she asked with anxious sympathy.

"Oui, Madame. The coach will take away your Cendrillon immediately."

"Is it not as I said to my husband! And M'sieu' Arnaud also goes?"

"Naturally. They will depart in a few minutes. As for their account, it is I who will regulate that if you will prepare it for to-morrow. And one does not buy goodness of heart, Madame; nevertheless——"

Nevertheless, in the short struggle of hands in the darkness, the hand that proffered and the hand that refused, the hand that proffered was the victor. I re-ascended to their room.

The other time I had not knocked, but this time I did so. They were as I had left them—ready in what they stood up in. He carried the little black bundle of her necessaries and his own. They took a last look round that warped and wonderful and memory-haunted room. . . .

But I had given them five minutes with its memories while I had negotiated with Madame. . . .

"Ready?" I said.

We descended that interior crack for the last time.

There was a sudden hush in the kitchen as we entered. The blonde heads, the dark heads, turned above the tunics of black and horizon-blue, faces watched us round the stacked-up képis on the table. But though probably little else had been talked of for the last hour, none was supposed to know that I was the Fairy Godmother who had brought



the coach for Cinderella. Derry took no farewell of the copains who, with sundry other nationalities, were the French population of France. Only Jennie ran towards Madame and was pressed for a minute against a bosom well able to sustain her weight. Derry got out the bicycles from behind the door. Outside he walked ahead between them. Jennie and I followed him along the Rue de la Cordonnerie.

A quarter of an hour later I had asked Madame at my hotel to be so obliging as to allow me the use of her telephone. There was no telephone at Ker Annic, but there was one at the Beverleys' hotel, and I knew that Beverley would see to it that a message for Alec was delivered immediately. I did not think it necessary to tell Beverley what it was all about; I merely asked him to send word to the Airs that I wished to see them in Dinan to-morrow.

Then I engaged another room—an ordinary hotel bedroom, where a chambermaid would bring up hot water in the morning and a bath was to be had for stepping across the corridor—just an ordinary hotel bedroom—not a place of memories and romance like that tumbling old room over that cabaret in the Rue de la Cordonnerie that looked as if it had sunk a yard into the earth—



PART V  
THE HOME STRETCH



## I

The next day we were five at the Hôtel de la Poste. We sat long after luncheon, on the creeper-awned terrace that overhangs the Petits Fosses. The other tables had long since been cleared, but the waiters, smelling thunder in the air, kept well away from ours.

My heart was sore for Alec too. Officially he had been driven to accept the sworn but unbelievable statement; in his heart he neither understood nor believed one single word of it. It was so unlike the engineering and Rugby football that he did understand. That to which his mind always returned was the plain meaning of these words: Treachery, Seduction and Falsehood.

Madge's reception of the incredible thing had been one of the most extraordinary experiences I ever had in my life. She and Alec had arrived in Dinan at nine o'clock and had come straight to my hotel. At a quarter past nine I had locked my bedroom door against the interrupting bootboys and chambermaids who busied themselves on staircases and landings. The morning stir also filled the courtyard below. Jennie and Derry I had told to keep out of the way until lunch-time. I had hastily covered my bed, and Madge had sat down on the edge of it. During the whole of the time I had talked, half a dozen Alecs in the various mirrors had met and re-met one another as he had paced the room.

First of all she had drawn an extraordinarily deep breath. Then slowly she had pressed her fingertips over her eyelids. Her lips had moved under the little eaves made by her hands. She had had the air of trying to see something anew, to see a succession of things anew, and to name them as they came. She had sat there for quite two minutes, eyes hidden, lips moving, seeing, repeating. . . .

Then, "The Club——" she had breathed.

And then, "Queen's Gate——"

I had found myself nodding.

"His brother—Arnaud—sketching——"

She was well away now.

Then suddenly her hands had dropped, she had stared at me, and a shrill cry had broken explosively from her.

"The Beautiful Bear! Derwent Rose! I knew it, I knew it, I knew it! . . . George Coverham, tell me—is it? *Is it?*"

"It is."

"That afternoon—looking at himself in the picture—his brother in Queen's Gate—Arnaud—Derwent Rose—I knew it, I knew it all the time——"

And she had slid with my coverlet gently to the floor.

And she did in fact recognise him—did pick out, as it were through some bright reversed telescope of time, that still-sealed but identical beauty of the grown man she had found so superb. He was like, as a son is like a father, as for a fleeting instant a newly-born babe may resemble a grandparent. She had wished to meet Derwent Rose. She had now met him, at this far end of a corridor of years.

And I had had to pick her up from where she crouched, on a coverlet on my bedroom floor.

But give her a little time—the time to pull herself together—and you could no more have persuaded Madge that it was not so than you could have got Alec to believe it was.

"But why wasn't I told all this at once?" he had demanded, not twice or thrice, but twenty times. "Are you telling me now, or am I wrong in my head? Why didn't you? Why didn't you? Then he could have been put where he belongs—in the asylum yonder——"

And again, and yet again: "You brought him to my house, you brought him to my house! You practically introduced him under a French name—you didn't contradict it anyway—you knew all about him—and I wasn't told—I'm only told after he's stolen my girl! Why didn't you tell me, Coverham?"

But I considered that I had less to reproach myself with than he thought. I had done everything in my power to isolate him, to keep her out of his path. Madge, not I, had asked him to Ker Annic. Madge had invited herself to his hotel in St Briac. He had given me his word, I had trusted to it, and he had broken it. And had I at any time told Alec the truth he would no more have comprehended it than he did now.

So he had railed bitterly on, turning the nightmare over and over again, meeting and re-meeting himself in the mirrors, very much as Derwent Rose had met and re-met himself in the windings of his marvellous life.

"Oh, we're mad! We're all mad! Any chance of our waking up? And you talk to me about somebody called Derwent Rose as if I ought to know all about the fellow the moment you mention his name! I never heard of a Derwent Rose in my life! Who the devil is Derwent Rose anyway?"

This at any rate Madge had been able to tell him.

"But he says he's never written a book in his life! Who should know if he doesn't?"

I made another attempt.

"The idea, Alec, is that that is a corroboration of the whole thing. He doesn't remember that he ever wrote a book, and I've a notion it would be safer not to try to make him remember. Another thing, Alec. You say I'm mad. But you can have absolutely independent evidence any time you like. Julia Oliphant's in Dinard. She knows nothing of what's happening in this room. Go to her and tell her, from me, that she's to tell you all she knows about a man called Derwent Rose. Then see what she says."

"And you say you're going to make a legal adoption of something that's shaped like a man but ought to be kept in a padded room?"

"I am if it's possible. The letter's written and in the box. All we can do is to wait till I've had a reply to it."

"Oh, we're all daft, we're all daft!" he had cried, his head in his hands.

And that was still his burden—that we were all daft. I will not deny that there seemed something to be said for it.

My letter to my solicitors had taken me the best part of the night to write. I wanted to be sure of the position without divulging too much. Derwent Rose existed; the record of his birth was to be found in Somerset House among the files for the year 1875, and nowhere was there a certificate of his death. If Derwent Rose as he now in fact was ought properly to have been born in the year 1902 or thereabouts, the thought had come to me that this difference might be bridged by my own legal adoption of him. Discreetly I had asked for information on this point. If the thing was feasible, Derry would then be George Coverham's son, and his marriage to Alec Aird's daughter would follow immediately. I had not seen what fairer offer I could make, and even Alec had grudgingly agreed—until the whole thing had once more overwhelmed him, and he had cried out that we were all daft and ought to be locked up.

That creeper-hung terrace at the back of the Hôtel de la Poste will probably never crash with its diners and waiters down into the moat below, but it always looks as if it might. A few slender iron struts stepped on to the old corbels of the wall below support it; for the rest it is suspended in the air, high as the nests in the great elms opposite, part of the ivy of the outer wall on which the hotel is built. Save for its screen of creeper it is open to the sky, and its dozen or so tables stand behind the great letters you read from the Fosse far below—HÔTEL DE LA POSTE.

And if from the ramparts by St Sauveur you see the shirley poppies of the sunset in the east, here you see the sun himself, burning intolerable holes through the elms, and turning the creeper into a crewelwork of flame and the valerian of the walls to dark blood.

But this was only after lunch, with the sun just outlining the wall to our left with brightness and shining on the fruit and cheese and coffee-cups which the waiters were itching to clear away. In the promenade below, absurd little hats



put forth little feet, now fore, now aft, as they went about their affairs. Derry's eyes were musingly on the walkers. Alec had compelled himself to sit at the same table with us, though his own meal had consisted of nothing but a bottle of wine. A few moments before he had uttered a grunt, that had been understood to mean that, since there was nothing for it but to wait for letters from London, we might as well wait at Ker Annic as here.

Suddenly Derry removed his eyes from the hats below and looked at Alec, deferentially but obstinately.

"Speaking for myself, sir——"

Though he had nothing of Alec but his profile, he went on.

"If you don't mind I shall not come. Sir George has tried to explain to you, and I've tried to explain to you, that there was nothing for it but the way I took. We've agreed it's no good going into all that again. Call it my pigheadedness if you like; I can't very well object to anything you call me; but I won't come. I'll come, if I'm still asked, when everything's settled up. And that should be a week at the outside."

Alec turned. It was plain that he would loathe his son-in-law, when he became that, to the end of his days.

"It will or it won't," he growled.

"It can't be much longer than that, sir."

"Can't it? Let me tell you how it can. I may have to swallow that insane yarn for the moment; you've left me very little choice—took dashed good care of that. But you've got to find somebody else crazy enough to get it down yet."

"What do you mean, Alec?" I interposed.

"Any English parson," Alec flung over his shoulder as he rose and walked away.

Derry sighed as his broad back disappeared into the hotel. When you have cut a knot it is difficult to tie it again. The straightforward course of his choice seemed little less crooked than the other. Almost it seemed a mistake after all.

## II

I perfectly well understood Derry's scruple about going to Ker Annic. It was the kind of scruple I should have liked a son of mine to have. Except as a husband he had no footing in that house, and except as a husband he refused to enter it. I think he would have given much to have been able to say that he never had set foot in it, but that milk was spilt.

But Jennie would never be torn from his side, and the chances were that Madge would not now be torn from Jennie's. So it looked as if either Alec must return to Dinard alone or else stay with us at the Poste and make the best of it.

Half an hour before lunch Madge had done an odd thing. She had called me away for a moment from Alec's side, and had asked me in which house in the Rue de la Cordonnerie I had found them. She had also wanted to know Madame Carguet's name. Then she had gone off. . . . I had seen her embrace of Jennie on her return. Her hand now once more stole to Jennie's as, with Alec's departure, we continued to sit at the table.

Again Derry sighed, but I think it was a little wilfully that he dwelt on the gloomier side, and that it was not altogether unmixed despair. We do allow ourselves these little luxuries at eighteen or thereabouts.

"Well, I've made a lot of bother," he sighed.

Madge was half cross, half consoling. "Oh, I expect it will come out all right in the end," she said impatiently. "He'll come round presently."

It began to look as if she herself had already come more than half-way round. And, now that Alec and his thunder-cloud had gone, a waiter ventured to advance.

"Si on peut désservir, Madame——"

Madge rose abruptly.

"Yes, let's go out. It's no good sitting here getting morbid. Which way has my husband gone? Because just for

an hour I'm going in the opposite direction. Come along, let's all go for a walk."

We left the creepered terrace, crossed the courtyard of the hotel, and came out into the Place Duguesclin.

I think I have discovered what it is that gives certain French façades their air at once luminous and austere. It is the roofs above them. Our flat-pitched English roofs thankfully send back heaven's light where it comes from; but these, steeply mansarded, dormered, and hog's-backed again above that—it is these that flash it into our eyes like mirrors, these across which the shadows of the chimneys lie, blots of black in the glitter. The façades themselves may be flatly lighted or gloomed over with pastel-like shade; it is above that everything happens, above that the sun, the brick and the shining slate play out the drama of the altering day.

And the sun was Lord of Dinan that afternoon. He turned the arcades of the fishmarket to barrels of blackness, but crowned the roofs beyond with flashing silver. The dark limes of the Place Duguesclin might drink up his rays like green blotting-paper, but the east side of the Square gave them out again as if the pale paint and chalk and plaster had been self-luminous—faint greens of peeling ironwork, flaky blues of closed shutters, the dazzle of the roof, the chimneys like tall dominoes on end, patched with bricks of rose. And what a town for him to play with! The towers, the gates, the ivied encircling walls, are but the outer shell of the immemorial place; within it, what pranks and gaieties of light and under-light and hide-and-seek of shadows does not his Lordship play! Derry began to cheer up. Eighteen is never downcast for long. This father-in-law-elect of his might sit morosely at the same table with them or take his bottle of wine to whatever table he pleased; the sun would shine on carved stone and old painted wood just the same. Yes, Derry bucked up, and in a bright voice began to take command.

"I say, let's have a peep into the Cordeliers," he said. "It was shut the last time I tried to get in."

Under the legs of the Porches, across the street and in at the half-open portail we passed.

Oh, yes, Derry was decidedly better. He had treated Alec with grave deference, if not with entire submission; but now less and less did he seem to consider himself a culprit. As we passed along the cloisters he paused to show Madge a "Ci-gist" or a bit of old woodwork let into a wall; and from these he turned to the *affiches* and class-lists of the wall on the other side. His head was high. He was Derwent Rose, fixed and indivisibly. If lately he had not been so, so much the better these times than those. He was going ahead; he was going to marry; a year hence might find him looking exactly a year older than he looked at this moment; and though for the moment a certain modesty and humility might be due from him, abjectness and shame—no. He trod the cobbles and *dalles* lightly by Madge's side. And I think that already the rogue knew that he could turn her round his finger as he pleased.

For while Alec might never have heard of a novelist called Derwent Rose, and might secretly be rather proud of the fact, she had read every word he had ever written. She knew more about it than he knew about himself, since he now knew nothing. Perhaps, walking silently by his side, she realised the power and passion at present folded up in him, but soon again to be declared. And perhaps she saw even further than his own re-creation. There is a passion of grandmotherhood, different, but even more unrelenting than that tender rage that brings us all into the world. That Jennie should never have married was inconceivable; Jennie was to have married whom she chose; and what, for beauty and gentleness and knowledge and strength, could she have chosen better than this? Were there whispers in Dinard? Madge was capable of dealing with them. If there was talk, then there should be more talk, till all was talked down. By and by Madge would start her own, the authentic version of the affair. And with this young man presently settled as George Coverham's adopted son, and Jennie blushing and brooding on the other side of her, it would be a strange thing indeed if Madge Aird, who knew as much about intimate histories as anybody, could not put some sort of a face upon it.

Authoritatively Derry led us through the cloisters and under a low tunnel-like arch. We came out into a bright courtyard with plane trees and doors at intervals round it.

"This is what I wanted to see," he said smilingly, but a little as if what he wanted to see overruled everything else. "Especially that bit over there."

It was a lime-white old court, with tourelles to the west and north. In its south-eastern corner rose a slated ogival turret with a gilded ornamental flèche. An old woman in a lace cap was filling a bucket at a tap, and from one of the dark upper windows came a girl's light laugh. Through one of the doorways a glimpse could be seen of school-desks, grey and cracked and dry as the legs of the Porches themselves. The tourelle in front of us carried a little side-belfry, and its inch-thick plaster had flaked off in great maps, showing the rubble beneath. And again the sunlight was absorbed by the plane trees, but blazed on the roof, made the flèche a vivid sparkle against the blue, and seemed to penetrate into the very substance of the soft decaying white.

"Now just come and have a look at this," said Derry, striding across the court.

The thing that he had brought us to see might almost have passed unnoticed in Dinan, where at every corner something that man's fine wit has carved has been uncarved again by stupid and obliterating Time. It was no more than a bit of moulding, the upper edge of which caught the sun, directly, making the cavetto underneath it a soft yellowing glow. But into that rounded plaster tourelle with the belfry a flat door had at one time been placed without interruption to the moulding, and in the result the sun had a frolic indeed. For no man had designed that miraculous accident where curve and flat met and deliciously quarrelled, to be reconciled again by the sun's laughing kiss. Never did light and its opposite more sweetly interchange and compose. . . . I don't want you to think this is my own observation. But for Derry I should probably not have given it a glance. But for him it was a thing to come specially to see. He stood before it, moving his hand a little this way and a little that, as in a

sparkling room one will place one's hand over glass or water to see whether it is indeed that which makes the little fairy-ribbon on the wall. He peered underneath, he stood off, he glanced up at the sun. With his hand throwing the shadow, the sun and he were partners.

"What is it, Derry?" I asked him.

He laughed. "What is it? I should say it was everything," he replied. "Everything there is, and if there's any more, that too."

"Are you going to paint it, dearest?" Jennie asked.

He turned. "Eh?" he said.

And there, in that sun-flooded court, I had a swift premonition. Something seemed to tell me that he was not going to paint it. Neither was he going to write about it, nor even to speak of it again. He had no wish to communicate it to any other person, by any means whatever. That he himself possessed the pure understanding of it was enough; he would not even care that any should know that he knew, so he might but have the bliss of knowing. His painting was over, as his writing was over. Contemplation, withdrawal, solitude, the infinite soft ecstasy of being at one with that which is not one self, though it were but the sunlight on a bit of fifteenth-century plaster—that, it now flashed suddenly on me, was what we might henceforward expect.

And though he understood all mysteries, and had all knowledge, yet he now had something even richer to profit him. He had his Love.

"I should very much like a cup of tea," said Madge.

Instantly he was all graceful attention. The human desire for a cup of tea was equally a thing to be understood.

"This glare does get in your eyes a bit," he smiled. "There's a nice shady place not five minutes away."

As he led us back through the cloisters he all but took her arm.

His place was gratefully shady. Through a small teashop one passed into a sort of leafy cage that, I learned, had at one time been an aviary. It was empty, and at a little rustic table against the trellis we sat down.

"Would you mind ordering, Sir George?" he said. "This is one of my off-days for French, I'm afraid."

I ordered tea.

My new premonition proceeded to take still further possession of me. As he chatted with modest freedom to Madge I fell more and more into abstraction. I suppose that in all the circumstances it was my part to have taken charge of the conversation, to have guided it through the rocks and shoals of the difficult position, but I couldn't. Anyway he seemed quite capable of doing so.

Capable? There was nothing of which he was not capable. And yet at the same time he was capable of nothing! For, supposing that my foreboding was right, what was his future? Isolation and Oblivion indeed! What man can live, sufficient unto himself, excommunicated from the world, wrapped in the vanity that he is not as others? Who dare dwell alone with Truth? Is it not our anchorage and our joy to run with our little half-truths in our hands and to thrust them upon our neighbour, that he may admire and share them with us? Who so great that some such littleness is not the very leaven of his life? Derwent Rose had written; Derwent Rose had painted; and now Derwent Rose would withdraw himself to some Tower, shut the door behind him, and be forgotten of men because their affairs were too small for him. . . . It was just as well that I was going to adopt him. What otherwise would his living be? In what corner of earth would he plant his cabbages and cherish his perfect and unprofitable knowledge?

And would he retain his simplicity of heart, or would he harden into arrogance, sour into contempt, and—yes, it had to be faced—once more ask of God that One Question Too Many? . . .

And she, his meek and sweet Semele? How long would she endure this partnership of his Oblivion? How long would it be before she prayed that that Tower might fall and crush her into the earth? She was only Jennie Aird, seventeen years old, with the nape under her red-gold hair hardly yet browned by its exposure to the sun. Happier—I cannot

say; but better perhaps for her had she never seen this lovely lad who was so soon to be my son. She had married an angel, had endured his caress. But she could not follow him to his skies.

It was half-past five when we reached the hotel, and Alec was there waiting for us. He asked Madge where we had been, and when she said to the Convent of the Cordeliers I am pretty sure that I heard him mutter under his breath that that was exactly where "he" would spend his spare time—hanging about a girls' school.

"Well, I suppose you're staying here to-night," he said gruffly to his wife. "I'm going back. I may come again to-morrow. Better put a stop to those inquiries—unless they take it into their heads to bolt again. I shall probably be here by the nearest train to midday. I'm off now. Good night."

Poor fellow! I suppose it was the nearest approach to a kiss he could bring himself to give his wife and only child.

Something, I forget what, happened about our table on the terrace that night, and we had to dine in the room of which it was an extension. The sun was having his last and most magnificent fling for that day. He turned the room in which we sat to ebony-black. The eye could hardly distinguish in the corners the neo-Greek furnishings of key-pattern and fretted valances, of amphoræ on pedestals, of frieze and dentel and sham black marble. But everywhere through the ebony ran like wildfire a gold that the eye could hardly bear. A waiter would be lost in blackness save for a spot of burning gold on brow or nose-bridge or knuckle; a glass, a knife-blade or the edge of a plate would flash like a diamond. The creeper outside flamed like the Burning Bush itself; you would not have thought that the head of a woman dining under it could have flamed more, yet it did. And the glass of water she lifted pierced like a heliograph into the room.

And it was as we dined, not talking much, that Madge capitulated completely. The sun played "I spy" with the



white hand she suddenly put on Derry's brown one. She was not speaking to me, but I heard.

"Oh, my dear, dear boy—you'll see it will be all right—be a little patient—his bark's ever so much worse than his bite—and come and say good night to your mother presently."

### III

Derry now wore the English suit he had worn on the day when he had come to tea at Ker Annic, Jennie the white frock and the little white cap in which she had stolen out of the house that night. I never knew what became of their French clothes. To all appearances we were now four English sight-seers in a place where English sight-seers are bumped into at every turn. And I must mention a curious little incident that occurred when, the next morning, after breakfast, we left the hotel and strolled into the Church of St Sauveur to see how the little girls were getting on with their decoration for the approaching fête.

There is only one decent piece of glass in St Sauveur. That is the window of the north transept that looks down on the burial-place of Du Guesclin's heart. As we passed among the gay and lightsome shrines Jennie happened to pause under this window. I saw his sudden dead stop.

It is a remarkable thing when a man does the same thing twice in his life, each time for the first time. He looked at Jennie in St Sauveur just as, all those years before, he had looked at somebody else in a village church in Sussex; and he had no knowledge of the repetition. She stood there, all low-toned pearls of frock and cool dark apricot of face and neck; her hair peeped forth beneath the little hat; and there, under the mellow ambers and ruby-dust and bits of green that might have been dyed in Dinard's sea, for a minute she was aureoled. . . . She moved on, and we followed.

But in that moment it was not he who had been haled back into that earlier time. That was all over for him. He

did all anew. It was I myself who had come close to the ghost of my own youth.

The nearest train to twelve o'clock, by which Alec had said he would arrive, was the one reaching Dinard at twelve-fifteen. The one before that, leaving Dinard at ten-twelve, ran on certain days only, and moreover would hardly have allowed Alec the necessary time in which to stop the various inquiries he had set afoot. Therefore we had a long morning to ourselves, and it mattered little how we spent it. Indeed it mattered very little now what we did with our time until my letters should arrive from London.

So once more that morning, watching Derry, I seemed to be watching, not the Derry actually by my side, but a Derry who had been a stripling when I had been in my middle twenties. For example, a troop of dragoons clattered past, in blue steel hats, dark blue tunics, red breeches, black boots; and I saw the sparkle of his eyes at the four red pennons they carried. Just so, for all I knew, his eyes had sparkled when he had first seen the sentries at the Horse Guards. We strolled on to the Porte St Louis, and under its arch he paused. He examined the portcullis-grooves, the remnants of hinges, the steep couloirs down which the stones had been rolled and the boiling water poured from the guard-room above. I don't know whether in his other boyhood he had known York or Sandwich, but I saw by his face that his memory reduplicated those old echoings, the clanging of iron, the hurtling of stones, the shouting of men within the ringing arch. Outside in the Petits Fosses it was the same. He peered into slits, glanced at the machicolations aloft, measured salients and re-entrants and dead-ground with his eyes. I think he saw that "bélier à griffes" again in use, the staggering storied sow pushed up to the walls by the horses and oxen in the hide-hung penthouse behind. . . . And this same man had seen modern war! He had flung the Mills and the "hairbrush," had worn a box-respirator, seen wire-netted gunpits and flame-throwing and the white puff-balls following the aeroplanes through the sky. Extraordinary, extraordinary! I could not get used to it. . . .

At twelve o'clock I walked on to the station to meet Alec. His train was a few minutes late. It drew up on the farther set of rails. At Dinan one walks across on the level, and as I advanced to meet him I saw him appear round the engine.

But not until a moment later did I see that he was followed by Julia Oliphant.

She was dressed in travelling-tweeds, but it was not the tweeds that filled me with the instant conviction that she was departing and had come to say good-bye to Madge. It was rather something indefinable in her face. Nor had she come to corroborate my story. She and Alec had doubtless already got that over, if ever it could be got over. She greeted me with a faint smile, but without speaking. In fact I don't think that one of the three of us spoke during the seven or eight minutes it took us to reach the Poste.

Once more something had happened about our terrace-table. Perhaps because of the slight lateness of Alec's train, added to the quarter of an hour we had already delayed our meal (for *déjeuner* at the Poste is at twelve), the only table capable of seating six had been made over to a party of visitors who would depart in little more than an hour by the *vedette*.

This, however, seemed to suit Alec rather than otherwise. He took Madge by the arm.

"Then you come over here," he said to her. "You've got till six o'clock to talk to Julia. I want a word with you first."

"And I want a word with you too," I heard her reply as she turned to follow him.

So Madge and Alec lunched some tables away, out of earshot, while Julia and Jennie, Derry and myself, sat down behind the iron "O" of the sign *HÔTEL DE LA POSTE*.

Had it not been for Derry I think our lunch would have been as silent as our walk from the station had been. Jennie rolled bread-pellets and fiddled with salt. I moodily wondered whether Julia would not have done better to have taken her farewells with Madge as said and have stayed away. But it frequently happens that a happy mood at the

beginning of an acquaintance sets the key for the meetings that follow. Derry had come off gaily best with Miss Oliphant when, instead of questioning her about that bicycle she had fetched from St Briac, he had anticipated her and had taken the wind out of her sails with smiling acquiescence; and he now was wreathed in ease and charm. There was a dash of the gentlemanly devil about that son-elect of mine. His grey-blue eyes were frequently downcast, but when he did lift them that imp of fun and mischief peeped unmistakably out.

"I'd no idea when I showed you my sketches that morning that you were a painter yourself, Miss Oliphant," he said demurely over his soup. "Jennie only told me afterwards. I don't think that was quite fair of you. . . . What do you paint?" asked the man who had stood before her, stripped to the waist, with her sewing-machine held aloft.

"Very little lately," said Julia composedly.

"Now you're putting me off. But of course I ought to have known. You can always tell by the way a person looks at a thing whether they know anything about it or not. Do tell me what you paint!"

"I'm supposed to be painting Sir George's portrait one of these days."

"Ah!" A polite little inclination of the head made you forget the mischief for a moment. "I'm no good at portraits. Never dared try, in fact, except for that sketch of Jennie, and you can hardly call that a portrait. It would take more experience than I've got. You'd have to know a good deal about a person before you risked painting their portrait I should think, wouldn't you?"

And that of course was pure mischief again, for he was virtually telling her, though without words, that she knew very little about him if she had expected him to give his intentions away by making a fuss about that bicycle. And similarly unspoken was his daring little invitation to her—to her who had drawn him from memory as King Arthur, in armour and a golden beard—"Won't you learn a little about me and paint me one of these days?"

So I watched her as she saw, for the second time in her life, what I saw for the first time in mine—the father of the man he had been and was to be again, his acts and gestures varying with a thousand accidents of circumstance, but himself essentially and unchangeably the same. You may charge me if you will with laying claim to knowledge after the event, but there radiated from every particle of him his own yet-folded potentialities. His gentle mischief towards her was the germ of that masterful wit that had made the Barnacles of *The Vicarage of Bray* skip at his pleasure. His good-humour and urbanity and willingness to talk while we sat oppressed and silent were, in little, the qualities that had bloomed in his mature work, *The Hands of Esau*. Only the fierce passion of *An Ape in Hell* was to seek, and none could have said that it did not lurk there, inappropriate to the occasion, therefore uncalled on, but deep-slumbering under all.

And if I was able to make a dim guess or two at these involutions, what of this woman to whom it was not guessing, but open knowledge? In her mind was a parallelism indeed! I had seen one trifle for myself that very morning—his sudden stop when Jennie had paused under the window of St Sauveur; but of just such bright threaded beads of memories her whole life, all of it that was worth anything to her, had been composed. Her unwavering love had been the string that had held all together. And not only did she sit there now telling, as it were, these beads over, to the last one drowned at the bottom of the pools of her deep eyes; she had them uniquely and desolately to herself. He, who had provided them, had no part whatever in them. She could no longer say “Do you remember this or that.” He remembered only from the moment of his setting eyes on Jennie. As unconsciously as when he had stripped to the waist for her, as unknowingly as when he had swum before her, he now seared her in his very innocence and ignorance. A village church—Sussex fields and lanes—a day at Chalfont—another day somewhere else—and a week-end at my house . . . oh, the jewels were quickly counted. Perhaps

she had others of which I did not know. If so, they were the secret of the eyes that looked away past the elms, down on to the walking hats in the Fosse below.

And he would grow up again, but she could only continue her life. In another twenty years he would be as old as she was now; but she, I myself . . . only Jennie, only Jennie would be by his side on that distant day. At some still unknown fireside, in some unguessed house or garden, they would speak of "poor old Miss Oliphant, poor old Coverham," long since out of the way. Different generations, different generations!

And—I cannot be sure of this, and I shall never know—but I do not think that by this time he, who had started the whole mystic thing, had the least recollection of anything whatever he had been and done.

"But look here, Miss Oliphant," he was saying. "Jennie's going to lie down this afternoon; won't you let me take you for a walk? Let's go to Léhon or somewhere. You don't mind, do you, Jennie? And"—he laughed, perfectly conscious of his charming and irresistible impudence—"it seems awfully stiff to go on calling you Miss Oliphant! Sounds so fearfully high-and-dry! Oh, I know! Shocking scandal! But if you'll come for a walk with me——" He twinkled.

Jennie had not uttered a word. Nor had she eaten more than a few crumbs. Suddenly she got up.

"I'm going to lie down now," she said. Then, turning timidly to Julia, "Can you come with me for just a minute—Julia?"

Julia got instantly up, passed round the table, and preceded her into the hotel.

Other lunchers also were astir. The party of visitors who had usurped our table were settling up with the waiter. Derry and I sat awaiting Julia's return. Alec and Madge, at the neighbouring table, seemed to have finished their talk. I did not know what Alec's announcement to her had been. What she had said to him I thought I could guess.

Suddenly, after an absence of barely five minutes, Julia reappeared. She walked straight up to Madge and held out her hand.

"What?" I heard Madge's surprised exclamation. "But I thought——"

"——by the boat, I think . . . ever so much . . . delightful. . . ."

She shook hands with them and crossed over to us. She looked straight into Derry's face. We were all standing. The five or six words she spoke were as if she was telling those beads again. Each one was isolated, bright, lingering yet relentlessly passing, a thank-offering, a prayer——

"So—long—Derry—dear . . . all—the—best," she said, her hand in his.

"Good-bye—Julia," he said, smiling.

She walked away.

I caught her up in front of the hotel. Little groups of people moved across the lime-shaded Square, all in one direction, seeking the Porches and the Lainerie, leaving themselves comfortable time for the vedette. We followed them. She did not take my arm, neither did any word pass between us.

Under the Porches, past the Convent we went. The groups of people became more frequent as they concentrated from various luncheon-places. We dropped down the steep astounding street that is called Jerzual. We were nearly at the Porte, of which the twelfth-century portion is the modern part, before she opened her lips.

"I hate people who cry," she said suddenly.

Then she closed her lips again.

I supposed she meant Jennie. I didn't answer.

She only spoke once more. This was at the embarcadère, as she stepped on to the vedette.

"Don't wait," she said. "I suppose I shall be seeing you in London some time."

Obediently I turned away.

## IV.

Alec had had nothing new to say to Madge. Only the variations had been a little more elaborate. The thing was as lunatic to him as ever, and it all came of not stopping in one's own country. Things like that never happened at his office in Victoria Street or on the Rectory Ground at Blackheath.

"You can stay on here if you like, but I'm off back," he said. "And the next time you catch me in France or anywhere else foreign you can tell me about it. And you can let me know when they're married. Does that three-eighteen run to-day, or is that another of their Sundays-and-week-days excepted?"

"The waiter will tell you," said Madge.

"Damn the waiter," said Alec.

So there were four of us at the Hôtel de la Poste.

I don't know what happened to letters during those early September days in Dinan. Somebody told me they went on to Paris to be sorted; I only know that it took an unconscionable time to get an answer from a place I could have got to and back again in a couple of days. And as three, and then four days passed, I think I could have written a Guide Book to Dinan, so familiar with it did I begin to come. And always it was a laughing, buoyant, affectionate and extraordinarily clever Derry who conducted us everywhere.

Then, when finally my letter did arrive, it was inexplicit, and I had either to go to London myself or write again. It was Madge who entreated me to stay. So I wrote my second letter.

Often we went out into the surrounding country as a change from the town. Derry never touched a brush, never once mentioned painting. Occasionally he and Jennie went off together somewhere, but for the most part we kept together. So far I had to admit that there was no sign of his young godhead being too much for his simple white-hearted Semele. She adored him with every particle of herself,



from the feet that ran to meet him to the eyes that continually thanked his face for being what it was. And never Bayard nor Du Guesclin nor Beaumanoir of them all had served his lady with a gentler love than young Derwent Rose had for Jennie Aird.

One morning at a little before ten we went up into the Clock Tower in the Rue de l'Horloge. This tower, together with the belfry of St Sauveur, is the highest point of the ancient town that crowns Dinan's rock. Up and up inside the turret we mounted, through lofts and empty chambers and timbered garrets, till the stone gave way to slate and wood and lead, and the soft tock-tocking of the clock itself began to sound. The clock is in a room with a locked and glass-panelled door, a machine of brass on an iron table, with a slow escapement, compensated pendulums, and the white hemp ropes of the weights disappearing through a hole in the floor to the stories below. On the iron table stood an oilcan, and the small indicator-clock showed a few minutes to ten. A circular piercing in the wall gave us light, and light also streamed down through the opening where the wooden ladder rose to the upper platform. We peered through the glass door, while "Tock-tock, tock-tock" spoke the unhurrying clock. . . .

Then on the verge of ten a large vane slipped and dissolved itself into a mist, to the murmur of moving wheels. Four times on an open third sounded the warning tenor bell overhead; and then the twin vane slipped and dissolved. There was a clang that shook the timbers inside their skin of lead. . . .

"Come along, Jennie!" cried Derry, making a dash for the belfry, while again the bell thundered out. . . .

It was two short flights up, but Madge and I were after them in time to hear the last two strokes. The structure still trembled with an enormous humming. This lasted for minutes, wave succeeding wave, crests and troughs of lingering sound, diminishing but seeming as if they would never quite cease. Our eyes sought one another's eyes expectantly as we waited for the last murmur of the hymning metal. . . .

Then light voices floated up from the street again, and the noises of the town could be heard once more.

"Just look at the view!" said Derry, hanging half over the rail.

But I wanted a rope round my waist before I approached that rail. A head for heights is not one of the things of which I boast.

Another day, this time in the afternoon, we pulled in a skiff a mile or two down the Rance, where men were fishing with the "balance"—the net on the crossed bough-like arms that made a dripping bag while the rope ran over the pulley of the pry-pole. Men used the same machine in the days before Moses, they are using it to-day on the Rance and the Yang-tse-Kiang. It was this vast antiquity that seemed to strike Derry, even more than the fortifications had struck him, even more than that clock that tried to measure with its "tock-tock" something that had no beginning and can have no end. Several times he seemed on the point of speaking, but each time desisted. There was nothing to be said, no word that, like the clock, was more than "tock-tock, tock-tock." And I fancied that for a day or more past he had talked much less, that he was ceasing to talk, as he had ceased to write, as he had ceased to paint. He sat for long spells thinking, as if measuring that which was himself against all that was not himself and coming to his understanding about it. . . . He and Jennie had the oars. Suddenly he gave a little laugh, very musical, and took the oar again.

"Stroke," he said.

We set off back up the stream.

We landed at the Old Bridge and began the ascent to the town; but near the Arch of Jerzual, almost on the very spot where Julia had said she hated people who cried, he stopped again. From a dark interior on our left had come the knocking of a hand-loom. We entered, and Madge translated his questions into French.

Once more he seemed to find the same fascination—the spell of the oldest and of the newest, the first primitive

principle of which our modern inventions are but elaborated conveniences, man measuring his strength and pitting his wit against all that is not man. So men had fished, so they did fish. So they had woven, so they did weave. They had fought in steel caps with hand-grenades in the past, they fought in steel caps with hand-grenades still. And nothing to be written, painted or said. As it had been in the beginning it would be until the end. A momentary life was not meant for the expression of these things. They were for contemplation, perfect understanding, and—silence.

That was on a Saturday evening. After dinner we strolled to the Jardin des Anglais again and stood looking over the ramparts. There were no shirley poppies in the sky now, but a serene unbroken heaven, a tender blue fading to the still tenderer peaches and greys that merged into the darkening land. The cypresses below us were inky black, the river where the fishermen had fished a soft thread of inverted sky. Folk again took their evening stroll round the walls. None of us spoke. I was wondering what Julia Oliphant was doing in London.

Suddenly Derry broke the silence. He did so in these words.

"It's all right for Léhon and the Château de Beaumanoir to-morrow morning, I suppose?"

"Yes, dear boy," said Madge.

How was she to have known, how was I to have known, how "all right" it was for Léhon, the Château de Beaumanoir and—to-morrow?

## V

The château stands a bare mile out of Dinan, and we had been there half a dozen times before; but Derry loved those crumbling old towers on their upstanding rock. It rises almost sheer, buttressed round with the broken works, and from the talus to the plateau on the top is a network of precipitous paths. You ascend it very much as you can, and the view that is blocked as you approach it breaks on you

from the summit—first the sickening gulf of air at your feet, then the three or four miles of the southward plain, and the canalised Rance parting company with its attendant road to Tressaint, *écluse* after *écluse*, until it picks it up again towards Evran. That is when you look south. To the north, peering down through oak and beech as you might peer over the edge of a nest, are glimpses of white ribbon—the road along which you have passed. And on the level plateau in the middle, enclosed by oak and beech and lime, rubble-built but with dressed stone buttresses, stands the tiny modern Chapel of St Joseph of Consolation.

Jennie and Derry waited at the top of the last zigzag for Madge and myself, and then gave us time to recover our breath. It was eleven o'clock of a Sunday morning, and Dinan's bells sounded lightly in the distance. They languished almost like human voices as, instead of quickening for the final summons, they delayed, with longer and longer intervals until, when you expected just one more sweet note, all was silence.

I think that what gives that *château*-crowned rock its air of lightsome space is that you come to it from Dinan, where everything crowds upon you, the Porches trample you, and the people across the street go to bed practically on the sill of your window. True, from the ramparts you have sweep enough, but unless you go there very early you get a mediocre, unbroken illumination, with every shadow hidden behind the face that is turned towards you, and two tones paint all, the pale blue of the sky and the average of the lighted land. So there is little to be seen from the *Château de Beaumanoir* to the north.

But turn your face south, and—ah! That is where the brightness lies! That flat average of greens and browns disappears, and you are looking, not at colour, but at Light itself! And yet every shadow points directly at you. All the sun that there is is on your own face—there, and graving as if on a tarnished silver plate a glittering outline round every object you see. Not a green, not a brown; all is grey; but twinkles with a silver edge every tree of Rance's valley,

and fuming silver is every thread of house-smoke that ascends. That stretch of lock that is lost again towards Tres-saint is a needle-flash, and you see the summer clouds only as you see the poplar-sheddings that float over the gulf in June—as if save for their edges they did not exist.

Then, turning your back on the glitter, you see the heavy browns and greens and ochres of the ruins once more.

“Do they never open this chapel, I wonder?” said Derry, peering through the grille of the closed door.

I peeped in after him. It had a tiny altar with four tapers, and a blue-and-white pennon with a device upon it. The little porcelain Virgin was blue and white and gold, and under the three lancet windows a dozen rickety chairs stood. The walls were whitewashed, with a picture here and there, and there was a rat-hole in the floor. A small and very bad rose-window reminded me of the window of St Sauveur, and I turned away again.

We potted about here and there among the scrub and masonry. Seen from above, the west tower, that which looks over to Trélivan, is the most complete; but the one to the south-west can be entered by climbing down half-effaced steps in the thickness of the wall. I descended. But there was nothing to see inside but the peep through a single loop-hole. Its walls chirped with grasshoppers, and a thin screen of oak gave it a roof. I was restless, and came out again. I wanted my letters from London. Then this interminable business would be quickly finished.

But London reminded me once more of Julia Oliphant, of what she was doing, of what she would do. . . .

Madge was waiting for me when I re-ascended. The others were nowhere to be seen. And we no longer had the ruins to ourselves. Over by the zigzag path to the east of the rock I heard voices and the brushing of branches. But the colline is so overgrown with shrub that it is not difficult to lose anybody. Derry and Jennie could not be far away.

“I expect they’re looking for blackberries,” said Madge.

“Then they’ll be on the sunny side,” I replied; and I led her across the shady plateau.

Then suddenly Madge saw them, for she called "Be careful there, children!" They were standing on the brink of the southern tower, looking away into the brightness. Close to them a mountain-ash overhung the deep, and about the scabious at the foot of it butterflies hovered, part of the airy light. Her hand was on his shoulder, her white frock a luminosity of grey shadow. About one pink glowing ear her loosened hair was a radiance of coppery gold.

But the newly-come party was close behind us. Through the leaves I heard a rustle and a woman's voice suddenly raised.

"I'm sure I saw him come this way——"

"I should get rid of the little beast if I were you," a man's voice growled.

Then the woman's voice uplifted again. "*Puppetty! Puppetty!* Oh, you naughty boy!"

The man and the woman appeared.

"*Puppetty! Puppetty!* . . . Excuse me, have you seen anything of a little—— Good heavens alive, if it isn't Sir George Coverham! Of all the—fancy meeting——"

But I had eyes for her for one fleeting instant only. All at once there had come a stifled cry from Derry. He stood there, dark against the morning light, embroidered round with light. His eyes were immovably on that woman who had called the dog—on that Daphne Bassett who, in years that were now clean-sponged from his memory, had been Daphne Wade. Jennie too was staring at her, bewildered that he should stare so. Her hand was still on his shoulder. She drew a little more closely to him.

The struggle that began on his darkened face was a struggle to remember something; or perhaps its real beginning was that he seemed to remember that there was something to remember. But what? Not a book that he had written? Not a book that she had written? Not two books, of which he had written one and she the other? He had never written a book—had never dreamed of writing a book; he left that to clever people like Sir George Coverham and Mrs. Aird—"Mummie."

A picture, then? No, not a picture. He had dabbled in paint for a bit—there was a lot of stuffy old canvas in the hotel now—but it couldn't be that. . . . He did not look at Jennie. His hands tried to put her away from him. He muttered hoarsely.

“Let me go, Jennie, let me go.”

But she only held him the more closely, both arms now wrapped about him.

Then he cried out sharply, loudly. “Let go—let go, I say—and don't look—take your eyes away—*don't look at my face!*”

But she would now never let him go. She would look at his face, yes, even though he commanded her not to, because of what had already begun to pass there. . . .

And what that was you may see by turning back to the beginning of this book. Yesterday, in the Tour de l'Horloge, a clock had prepared to strike the hour. It had begun with the soft fluttering of a vane that had dissolved into a mist; there had been the murmur of mechanism, those preparatory notes on an open third.

But this was not hearing. It was seeing. We all saw. Jennie saw.

As the hues of a coloured top alter at a touch of the finger, so change began to succeed change over that face with its back to the morning light.

Oh, by no means violent ones at first. Quite gentle ones. We merely saw the youth who had painted a few pictures, the young man who had swum the Channel, the athlete who had discussed tides and currents with boatmen in the Lord Warden at Dover—

Then a certain acceleration (though you must understand that this fantasia on Time that we watched is but comparative, happened in a few instants, more quickly than I can write or you read). Against the sun a glint of golden beard appeared and was gone in a twink. I had once seen that beard at breakfast-time, in a South Kensington mews.

But oh my heart! Then a terrific leap! . . . His whole form bulked, loomed. Eleven years descended on him like a

Nasmyth hammer. He seemed to take the very brain out of my head and to put it, not in France at all, but into a house in Surrey with a pond in front of it, while he, with a punt-pole in his hand, brought a piece of water-starwort into Julia Oliphant's hand——

His arm, both his arms, were over his face as he tried to hide it all from her. No cry broke from him now. But her arms were locked desperately about his waist. She would never let him go.

Then somewhere a dog yapped, and at the sound the horrible life-slide ceased. It ceased because it could not go further. How could it go further than that side-street off Piccadilly in which the woman who had written *The Parthian Arrow* had set a dog upon the author of *An Ape in Hell*? Already I had started forward, but my foot caught in the scrub, and I found myself rolling, clutching wildly in the air for something to hold.

But I swear it was for them and not for myself that I feared.

Then, as they slowly swayed outward together by the mountain-ash, the beautiful, re-transfiguring thing happened.

A stupid woman with a wretched little pet dog! A rebuff on a pavement over a miserable literary squabble! Was it for *this* that the years had changed on his face as the hues change on a spinning top? Was *that* all that this commonplace apparition of a woman had reminded him of? Why, he had thought it had been something important, something to do with the peace of churches, the beauty of coloured windows, the glorious thunder-roll from the organ! He had thought it had something to do with his boyhood's dreams, aspirations, vows! But only *this!* . . . It was not worth the trouble of having sought it. He had better get back to his deliverance.

He laughed. The vane whirred in the opposite direction. He began to go back to Jennie——

He swam back to her across the Channel, knowing now that she awaited him on the other side——

He ran at Ambleteuse——ran swiftly to her.



His eyes met hers in the glow of the headlights at Ker Annic——

Once more he stood with her in that Tower of dead and forgotten doves—fled on silent wheels with her through the night—in that upper room in the Rue de la Cordonnerie took her, stainless, into his own virgin arms——

He was here again, back at the Château de Beaumanoir; young, beautiful, innocent, grave, his arm dropped now, looking into her eyes, calling to her.

*“Look—look at me—yes, look, Jennie!”*

“Oh, my God, catch them!” Madge screamed.

But I don't think she saw what I think I saw. Let us say that the scrub was treacherous, that it betrayed his foot; it makes no difference now, for I have no son. Why, after all, go forward again if going forward meant no more than that four-seconds pilgrimage from which he had but that moment returned? Better as it was, neither forward nor back nor standing still on that edge of masonry or on any other edge. He drew her close to him. Their lips met. . . .

*“Oh, Lord, Thou hast prevented him with sweetness; he asked life of Thee and Thou hast given him length of days.”*

We heard the parting of the bushes down below. . . .

A yard beyond the mountain-ash the butterflies continued to hover, and past them the silver-flashing stretch of canal-lock by Tressaint could be seen once more.



## EPILOGUE

I stood before the Tower at the Château de la Garaye. No thrashing-gin sounded, for the day's work was over, and in and out of the empty windows of the glimmering Renaissance ruin the bats flitted. Madge, Alec and I were leaving France to-morrow. There was nothing further to do, there is nothing further to write. I shall never re-visit Dinan.

But I did not enter their Tower. I should hardly have done so even had not that which showed in the saffron sky seemed to forbid me. For it seemed to me the perfect symbol of his end. It was the old moon in the new one's arms.

Just so, just like that curved golden thread, so thin that a few minutes before it had not been to be seen—just so had that tender crescent of his youth held that dim and gibbous and ghostly round of his past. Just so he had been haggardly haunted, but touched with golden innocence in the end. And he himself seemed to me to be peeping into that Tower which I did not enter, as for ages other crescents had peeped when the doves had filled that hollow with their crooning and no other sound had broken the hush of eve. And thenceforward he would always re-visit it, embracing with a gilded edge the whole dark content of man.

But they lay elsewhere. They are not together, but side by side. Alec would not have it otherwise, and Madge did not seem greatly to care.

The parallelism of their fair young bodies is the closing parallelism of this book. On his stone is a discrepancy that commonly passes as a carver's error. They lie thus :

JANET AIRD		DERWENT ROSE	
b. 1903	d. 1920	b. 1875	d. 1920
at the Château de Beaumanoir		at the same Time and Place	
aged 17 years		aged 16 years	

R.I.P.









